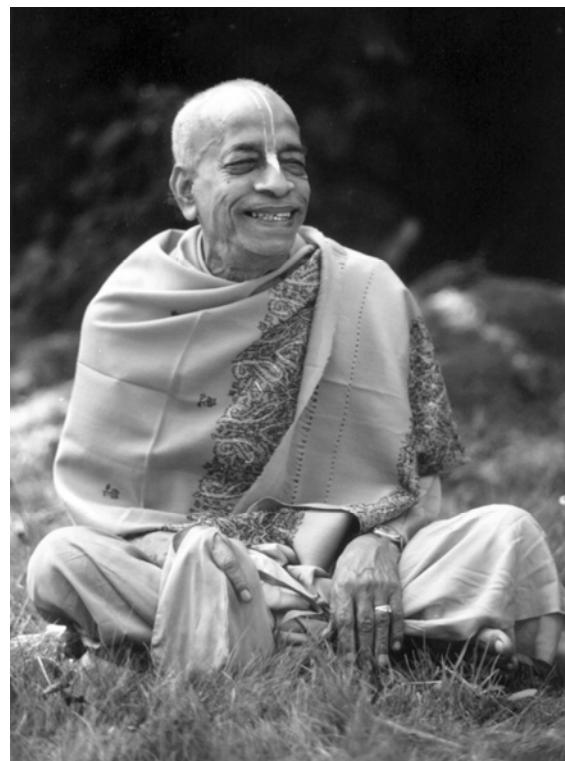


# Chapter 1

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## Identifying the Divine Guide

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## Identifying the Divine Guide

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"tad viddhi praēipātena paripraçnena sevayā  
upadekñyanti te jī änaà jī äninas tattva-darçinaù

### TRANSLATION

Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized souls can impart knowledge unto you because they have seen the truth. [BG 4.34]

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### Blind Attachment Leads to Misery

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In Bhagavad-gita, Arjuna recognizes that he is afflicted by the ‘kripana’ mentality, which had brought immense grief, weakness of heart and indecision in his life. Arjuna submits this problem to Krishna, accepts Him as his divine master and begs Him to free him from that insurmountable lamentation.

There are two types of men -- ‘kripana’ or a miserly person and a ‘brahmaṇa’ or an intelligent person. A kripana is a man who due to bodily attachment ignores spiritual life. He thinks that life is only meant for eating, drinking and making merry. Surrounded by relatives and friends, his pocket filled with money, his subordinates praising his material achievements, a foolish man in such a state of intoxication, forgets that inevitable time is gradually devouring him, ultimately to strip him of everything in the form of death. Thus the kripana chooses the path of flickering pleasure and a brahmaṇa chooses the spiritual path that leads to eternal joy. If you show a child a chocolate and a hundred rupee or a thousand dollar currency note, he may foolishly choose the chocolate, as he does not know the value of the currency note. This is the condition of majority of the people of this world. A kripana is satisfied with struggling to set right the problems of this world and delight in paltry material pleasures that will be taken away by the power of time. But a brahmaṇa keeps the ultimate spiritual goal in mind. Just as in one currency note hundreds of chocolates



are hidden, similarly a brahmana knows that if one cultivates God consciousness, and returns back to Godhead, then all other problems will be solved in one stroke.

Being intelligent, Arjuna could understand that his bodily attachment to his family members despite their pursuing the path of irreligion, and his wish to protect them from death, were the causes of his perplexities. He knew that Dhrtarashtra, due to his blind attachment to his son Duryodhana, allowed him to continue with his atrocious activities and nefarious plans to even try to kill the Pandavas by trickery. The Kauravas represented adharma and deserved to be killed for the well being of the society. Besides this, the Pandavas finished their punishment term of exile in the forest faithfully and were guided by the Lord of dharma, Shri Krishna. It was a question of whether to allow adharma to continue out of sentimental attachment to the Kaurava family, or to stand up boldly to fight and establish dharma. It was not just a war between Pandavas and Kauravas; but all worldly kings who were envious of Krishna and against the principles of dharma had joined hands with Duryodhana, while those who were adherents of dharma joined the Pandavas side. Thus it was a Dharma yuddha, not just any war. But owing to his bodily attachment to his family members Arjuna was shirking his kshatriya responsibility. If a boy finds his father, in a completely drunken state, beating his mother and sister in the street who have gone to lift him and bring him back home, then what is the boy's duty? Should he bow down at his father's feet out of respect or slap him, bring him to sanity and get him back home?

Thus to overcome blind attachments that lead one to a ocean of suffering and to perform our duties for the pleasure of the Supreme Lord without lethargy or hesitation, one needs the guidance and mercy of a spiritual master.

### **Absolute Necessity of a Spiritual Master**

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Sometimes when we talk about the importance of accepting a bona fide spiritual master, people admonish us saying that we should not blindly surrender our independent thinking to some authority. They think, "Will it not be much better if I were to think for myself, relying on my own power of analysis, rather than merely accept someone else's opinions as gospel truth?" Before being so apprehensive about accepting spiritual authority, let us see a few examples from everyday life, where we accept authority without questioning:

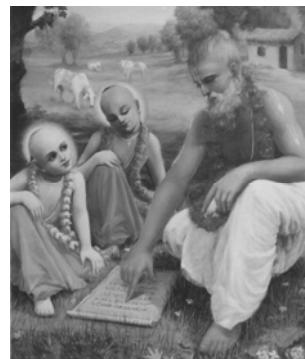
- We consume the blue or yellow, or pills of any color prescribed by a doctor hoping to get well soon.
- As soon as we board a bus, we are entrusting our lives to the bus-driver. Do we check the driver's credentials every time we board a bus?
- A child accepts his mother as an authority and comes to know of everyone and everything around him - his father, brother, sister, etc. - only through her.

- In a saloon, we allow the barber to shave our beard with a knife, confident that he won't kill us.
- A student accepts the authority of textbooks prescribed by the board.

Thus, we see that we have no choice but to believe authorities in order to get knowledge.

Even if we want to learn dance, or music, or athletics, or karate, or for that matter anything, we take training under a teacher or a coach. In other words, in order to gain mastery in any field, we agree to become an apprentice under an expert advanced in that field. Thus, we accept a teacher in every walk of life; then why not accept a teacher in spiritual life too?

Nowadays, students buy study-notes, cram them, vomit them and get a degree and do not feel the need of a teacher to teach them the college subjects. This may be possible in an educational system that tests just the cramming ability, writing speed, information reproduction, and communication skills, without testing what values a student has imbibed by that knowledge in his life. Spiritual life is a serious business, and any sincere seeker of truth can understand the need of a bona fide guru to get enlightenment. When the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Shri Krishna, descended to this world, He also set an example for us by accepting Sandipani Muni as His *guru*.



Lord Ramachandra also accepted Vashishtha Muni as His *guru* to set an example. So, even the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is the source of all knowledge and wisdom, accepts a *guru* to demonstrate the absolute necessity of accepting a *guru*.

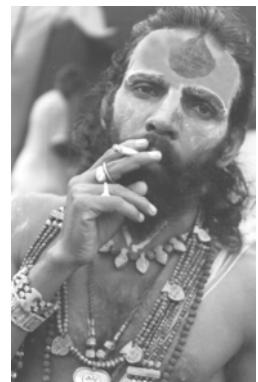
## **Identifying the Genuine and the Fake**

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### **Who is not a guru?**

Since the guru must transmit the truths of Vedic knowledge perfectly, he plays a crucial role. We should know who Guru is not and who Guru is. Regrettably, in recent years we have professional gurus (fake godmen) who:

- ⇒ charge fees to give secret mantras and make false promises,
- ⇒ allow their students to disregard all the Vedic regulative austerities (regulative austerities like avoiding gambling, meat-eating, intoxication and illicit sex),
- ⇒ teach yoga as simple gymnastic exertion and not as a means of connecting one to God,



⇒ maintain that the purpose of yoga is material well-being,  
 ⇒ defy the Vedas by declaring: 'I am God; You are God; Everyone is God' and so on.

The gullible masses blindly follow such fake godmen and are led to suffering in this life and the next. Thus such cheaters who pose as godmen, and the cheated who blindly follow them, are led to the ditch of unlimited sufferings. It is therefore necessary to first understand the symptoms of a bona fide guru -- that is, a spiritual master who has received pure knowledge and can impart it.

### **Who is a guru?**

Suppose you go to a jeweler's shop to purchase a diamond. Would you just jump at the first piece that you see? Surely not. You would perform detailed research before executing the actual transaction. Perhaps, you would consult with some friends and experts in the business. Even after such consultations, you would try to get some warranty on the product to ensure that you are not cheated. Similarly, if we wish to become an engineer or a doctor, we would consider the reputation and authenticity of the institute that we plan to join.

But strangely enough, according to many, spiritual science is meant to be imbibed from one's grandfather or grandmother at home without any formal study. Such childish conceptions about spiritual science not only allow the standards of this most exact science to be drastically watered down, but also allow pretenders and unscrupulous parties to take advantage of naive followers.

Our imperfect senses cannot give us perfect knowledge of even this material world, then what to speak of things beyond matter, i.e., spiritual matters? Because we have no ability to approach God directly, anybody who has surrendered to God and is repeating His message without adulteration, can be accepted as God's representative, from whom perfect knowledge can be obtained.

## **Qualifications of a Guru**

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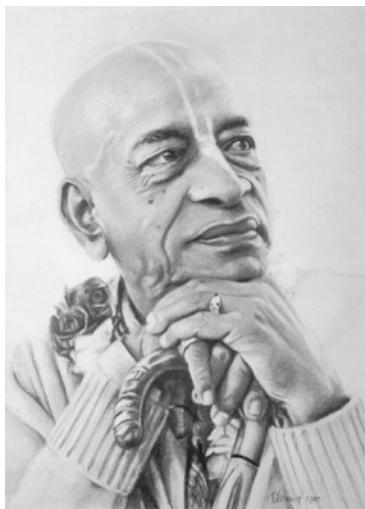
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One cannot test the genuineness of a spiritual authority by the language he speaks, by his physical appearance or by his nationality. Just like the genuineness of gold can be determined by certain specific tests, there are also tests to determine the genuineness of a spiritual authority as stated below:

### **What is the guru's understanding about God?**

- **The guru must have heard the Absolute Truth in a disciplic succession.** The disciplic succession comprises of spiritual masters and disciples, coming from God

Himself. The guru does not concoct some theory or philosophy of his own to promote himself in the public. He repeats what he has heard from his guru in disciplic succession.



- **The guru must have realized the conclusions of the scriptures by deliberation.** Because he has heard, understood, practiced, and realized the Absolute Truth, he should be fixed in devotional service to the Supreme. He should be able to confirm the authenticity of the message he is presenting by the support of the scriptures and teachings of the great seers of truth of the present and the past.
- **The guru should know the essence of the scriptures, not just be a Sanskrit scholar.** He needs to know the essence of all scriptures as explained in the Bhagavad-gita (15.15) ‘vedais ca sarvair aham eva vedyah “The essence of the Vedas is to know Me (Krishna).” If he knows this

essential principle of the teachings of all scriptures and lives according to this principle, he knows everything necessary for delivering his disciples. Once when Srila Prabhupada met two Vedic scholars in Vrindavan he asked them, “Can you say who is God?” Both scholars blinked for a while and said that the Absolute Truth is very difficult to comprehend and not possible to explain so easily. Srila Prabhupada then called a gurukula boy and asked him the same question. The boy promptly answered, “Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead.” Srila Prabhupada gifted him a cake and the boy ran away dancing joyfully to play with the other children. Srila Prabhupada then remarked, “Just see! Even this small child knows Krishna to be God whereas these Vedic scholars, after years of study, have no knowledge of the essence of all the Vedas.”

- **The guru is beyond caste-creed-color-nationality and other such superficial differences.** We should never think, “He is after all an African guru or an American guru—not Indian”, or “He was after all born in a shudra family.” This is offensive. When you employ a civil engineer to construct a house, do you ask him, “Are you a brahmana engineer or a shudra engineer?” Or when you go to a doctor, do you ask him, “Are you a brahmana doctor?” You only see if he is a qualified M.B.B.S or M.D. Similarly, yei krishna-tattva-vetta sei 'guru' haya - “One who knows the science of Krishna should be accepted as a guru” (CC.Madh 8.128). Instruction has to be taken from one who is in knowledge. It does not matter what his position is – whether he is a son, a boy, a shudra, a brahmana, a sannyasi, or a grihastha. Although

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu Himself was a brahmana (considered to be the highest varna or social order) and a sannyasi (considered to be the highest ashrama or spiritual order), He took instructions from Ramananda Raya, who was a shudra and grihastha but nonetheless very exalted spiritually. Lord Chaitanya also made Haridas Thakur, who was born in a Muslim family, as 'Namacharya or Acharya of the Holy Name'. Whoever is qualified in Krishna consciousness can become a guru; his family or material identity does not matter. His only qualification is that he must know the science of Krishna.

### **What benedictions does a guru bestow upon his disciples?**

- **The guru imparts spiritual knowledge, not mundane knowledge.** There are different types of knowledge used for earning a livelihood. One may study to become an engineer or a doctor. The guru is not the one who gives such knowledge. Real knowledge however, is Vedic knowledge, which involves knowing oneself, knowing God, understanding one's relationship with God, and one's duty. The guru teaches one how to go from the material world to the spiritual world – from the world of suffering to the world of eternal bliss.
- **The guru bestows, not material benefits, but spiritual knowledge to his disciple.** A guru is one who helps the disciple to come out of the darkness of ignorance with the torchlight of transcendental knowledge. He is meant to help the disciple cross over the ocean of nescience. He is neither meant for giving blessings to get gold, money, etc., nor giving some relief from some bodily disease. For gold and silver one may do business, and for relief from disease, one may go to a doctor.

### **What is the guru's relation with wealth, women and followers?**

- **The guru cannot be purchased with any amount of money; he is not after wealth, women, or increasing his followers.** One should not treat the guru like a dog. Sometimes wealthy people invite their guru to their home once a year to just show (or 'show off' to) their relatives that "I am also very pious." One should not just keep a photo of the guru on the wall of the house, and never take instructions from him. This is exactly how some fake godmen allow their disciples to deal with them. But a real guru is meant to give instructions and deliver us from the ocean of material existence. A graphic example of this comes in the life of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura, the spiritual master of Srila Prabhupada.

Once a wealthy man, who would give regular donations to Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, was attending his discourse. But instead of hearing attentively, he started talking with the person sitting next to him. At once Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati rebuked him, "Do you think you have purchased me with your donation, that you can do whatever you like during the discourse?"

- **The guru must have sense-control.** If a guru's senses are not controlled and he does not teach his disciples to control their senses, then he is not a qualified spiritual master. The scriptures list six symptoms of a guru: "A sober person who can tolerate the urge to speak, the mind's demands, the actions of anger, and the urges of the tongue, belly and genitals is qualified to make disciples all over the world." (Upadeshamrita 1) When a beautiful prostitute tried to allure Haridas Thakur, he transformed her into a devotee without falling down from his standard. His Divine Grace Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati had a lady disciple who wanted to meet her guru privately without her husband. Although she was of the age of his grand daughter, he refused to meet her privately saying that it was not befitting saintly behavior.

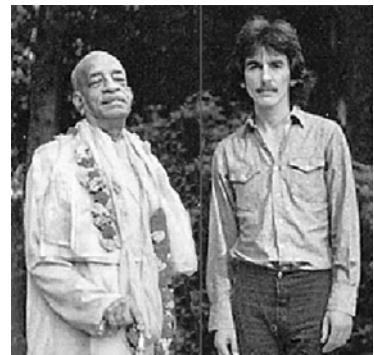


### What is the guru's general behavior?

- **The guru should be decorated with all saintly qualities.** The Shrimad Bhagavatam (3.25.21) explains: "The symptoms of a sadhu are that he is tolerant, merciful and friendly to all living entities. He has no enemies, he is peaceful, he abides by the scriptures and all his characteristics are sublime." Haridas Thakur continued propagating the holy names of Krishna despite being beaten up in twenty-one market places. Jesus preached the gospel of God and was ready to pay the price of being crucified on the cross. Prahlada Maharaj was tortured by Hiranyakashipu in various ways, but his determination to serve the Lord did not waver ever.



- **The guru should preach by his own example.** The word 'acharya' means one who teaches by personal example. One who smokes has no right to preach to others to avoid cigarettes. The guru should be a walking scripture and should exemplify all the teachings of the scripture in his life and thus inspire everyone to follow them. The guru should be engaged twenty-four hours in the service of Krishna. A nice incident from the life of Srila Prabhupada illustrates this. Once when Srila Prabhupada met the Beatles in London, George Harrison asked him: "Among the



many preachers of Bhagavad-gita who is bona fide?" Srila Prabhupada replied, "Bhagavad-gita is the word of Krishna. So to recognize who is the bona fide preacher of Bhagavad-gita you should check who is most addicted to Krishna."

### **Check & Balance Through 'Guru-Sadhu-Shastra'**

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In the Vedic method of receiving knowledge, there is a check-and-balance system called guru-sadhu-shastra. The teachings of the guru must correspond with the teachings of the sadhus (the past and present spiritual masters in the disciplic succession) which, in turn, must all correspond with the direct meanings of shastra (the scripture). This is the proof of perfect knowledge. It is the duty of every civilized human being to accept such a bona fide authority, gain spiritual knowledge, and thereby make his life perfect.

For example, when Lord Vamanadeva appeared in the sacrificial arena and asked Bali maharaja for three steps of land, Bali's guru Shukracarya understood that the small dwarf brahmaṇa, Vamana is Lord Vishnu Himself. He tried to stop Bali saying, "He is none other than Lord Vishnu. Don't promise Him three steps of land." Shukracarya was afraid that, if Bali becomes bankrupt, what will happen to his income? Thus Bali understood that Shukracarya is stopping him from offering everything to the Supreme Lord, who is the source of everything. According to scriptures and sadhus, one should offer everything to the Lord without any hesitation. So he went ahead and offered the oblations. Thus for his glorious surrender, Bali is counted amongst the twelve Mahajanas in the path of devotional service. The scriptures do not demand blind surrender to any guru without verifying his credentials, but ensure, check and balance through guru-sadhu-shastra.











## Chapter 2

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# The Spirit of the Bhagavad-gita

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## The Spirit of the Bhagavad-gita

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çré-bhagavän uväca  
 idaà tu te guhyatamaà pravakñyämy anasüyave  
 jí änaà vijí äna-sahitaà yaj jí ätvä mokñyase 'çubhä

### TRANSLATION

The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: My dear Arjuna, because you are never envious of Me, I shall impart to you this most confidential knowledge and realization, knowing which you shall be relieved of the miseries of material existence. [BG 9.1]

\* \* \* \*

### Importance of the Bhagavad-gita amongst the Vedic Literatures

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Now having taken shelter of the spiritual master, one should study the scriptures under his guidance in a spirit of devotion. Amongst all the Vedic literatures, Bhagavad-gita is a transcendental literature, which is considered the sumnum bonum of all Vedic literatures and can free one from all the miseries and anxieties of life, if one follows the instructions as they are. The Bhagavad-gita is glorified in Gita mahatmya as follows:

*maline mocanam pumsam jala-snanam dine dine  
 sakrd gitamrta-snanam samsara-mala-nasanam*

“One may cleanse himself daily by taking a bath in water, but if one takes a bath even once in the sacred Ganges water of Bhagavad-gita, for him the dirt of material life is altogether vanquished” [Gita Mahatmya 3].

*sarvopanisado gavo dogdha gopala-nandanah  
 partho vatsah su-dhir bhokta dugdham gitamrtam mahat*

“This Gitopanisad, Bhagavad-gita, the essence of all the Upanishads, is just like a cow, and Lord Krishna, who is famous as a cowherd boy, is milking this cow. Arjuna is just like a calf, and learned scholars and pure devotees are to drink the nectarean milk of Bhagavad-gita” [Gita mahatmya 6].

*ekam sastram devaki-putra-gitam eko devo devaki-putra  
 eva  
 eko mantras tasya namani yani karmapy ekam tasya  
 devasya seva*



"Let there be one scripture only, one common scripture for the whole world – Bhagavad-gita. Let there be one God for the whole world – Shri Krishna, son of Devaki. Let there be only one mantra, one hymn – the chanting of His name: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare / Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. Let there be one work only – the service of the Supreme Personality of Godhead" [Gita Mahatmya 7].

In Kali Yuga, people are short-lived. It is almost impossible for anyone to gain understanding of the entire Vedic literature. But Bhagavad-gita is the essence of all Vedic literature and it can give guidance to modern man about the way of perfecting his life.

### **The Spirit of the Bhagavad-gita**

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Although Bhagavad-gita is well known, only one who has taken it up in a spirit of devotion can understand it. Bhagavad-gita is not a mythological treatise spoken by some mortal, but it is the eternal, timeless, mature voice of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Shri Krishna, who is addressed as Bhagavan, the possessor of all six opulences.

#### **Story: "The South Indian brahmana who attained perfection in reading Bhagavad-gita"**

In the Chaitanya Charitamrita, the multi-volume treatise on the life and teachings of Lord Chaitanya, there is a beautiful story of a South Indian brahmana. It illustrates how Lord Krishna, although the source of all that exists, is completely renounced and becomes the humble servant of His loving devotees, out of His love for them. This is due to his opulence of renunciation.

In the holy place of Shri Ranga-ksetra, a Vaishnava brahmana would daily visit the temple of Lord Ranganath and recite the entire Bhagavad-gita. However he was not able to pronounce the Sanskrit words correctly, and so Sanskrit scholars around the temple used to make fun of him. But because, just by reading the Bhagavad-gita, he was overflowing with great spiritual ecstasy, he did not in the least bother about what people were talking about him.

Once on his South India tour, Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu met the brahmana and asked him, "My dear sir, why are you in such ecstatic love? Which portion of Bhagavad-gita gives you such transcendental pleasure?"

The brahmana replied, "My Lord, I am not very learned and therefore do not know the meaning of the words. Sometimes I read Bhagavad-gita correctly and sometimes incorrectly, but in any case I continue with my recitation because it is the order of my spiritual master."

The Lord then asked him why he was crying. The brahmaṇa replied, "Whenever I sit down with the Gita, the form of Lord Krishna as Partha-sarathi [Arjuna's chariot driver] appears in my heart. And as soon as I see this form I immediately remember how the Lord is bhakta-vatsala [especially kind to His devotees]. This thought makes me cry."

Upon seeing the devotion of the South Indian brahmaṇa, Lord Chaitanya embraced him and then told him that he had perfected the recitation of the Gita. Lord Chaitanya's approval of the brahmaṇa's perfection is far superior to millions of university doctorates. This accolade from the Lord proves that the Bhagavad-gita cannot be studied with material intelligence. The knowledge of the Gita must be received through the chain of acharyas, or spiritual masters, coming down in disciplic succession. That is the only method; otherwise studying the Gita is an exercise in futility.

The Mayavadis are persons who consider the form of Lord Krishna to be maya, or made of material elements. Out of envy they deny the sac-cid-ananda spiritual form of the Lord. Their goal is not to serve the Lord but to merge with the impersonal Supreme Brahman and become God. Thus, their small brains cannot understand how the Supreme Personality of Godhead can become the charioteer of His devotee and carry out his orders.

The message of Bhagavad-gita is confidential and will remain hidden to the mundane scholars who try to misinterpret the Lord's words. They do so out of envy for the Lord and to put themselves in the forefront. Such commentators can be compared to a bee licking the outside of a bottle of honey. One cannot have the taste of honey unless one opens the bottle and licks the contents. No matter how much one is well versed in computer software, one cannot do anything without knowing the password of the computer. Similarly the password to understand Bhagavad-gita is the spirit of devotion and submissiveness to the Lord and His devotees.

#### Story: 'Make the choice: You want Me or My energies?'

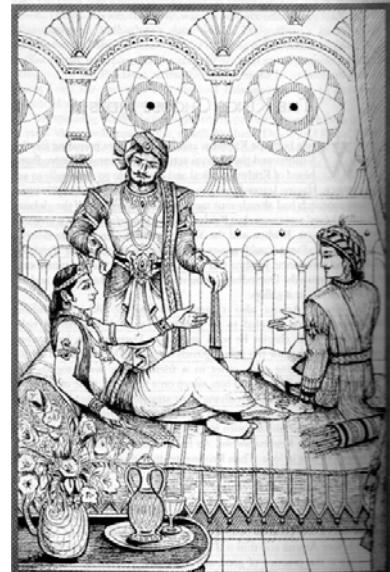
**O**nce when the Kurukshetra war was declared, Duryodhana sent messengers to every part of the globe to seek the assistance of various kings. But Krishna was so powerful that he warranted a personal request. Also Duryodhana knew that Krishna was the main support of the Pandavas, and if Duryodhana could get His assistance, then the Pandavas would stand no chance in winning the war. Arjuna also thought of Krishna, so both of them decided to go to Dwaraka.

When Arjuna arrived in Dwaraka, he saw the palace guards receiving Duryodhana. The two princes, after greeting each other, went together to Krishna's chamber. They found him asleep on a large bed. One of his wives was fanning him gently. Duryodhana went straight to the head of the bed and sat down, but Arjuna remained at Krishna's feet, standing with palms folded and gazing at his face with tears of affection in his eyes.

After a while when Krishna awoke, He saw Arjuna bowing to Him in love. Then Krishna sat up and saw Duryodhana by his head. After honoring them, He inquired why they had come. Duryodhana replied, "It is well known that you are equally disposed toward both myself and Arjuna. I have come here to seek your assistance in the war. Indeed, I arrived before Arjuna and thus it is only right that you assist me rather than him. This is the practice of good men and you, Krishna, are the best of men."

Krishna looked smilingly at Duryodhana. "I accept that you arrived first. But I saw Arjuna first. Therefore, I think I will help both of you. Scripture ordains that one should help the youngest first, so I will first offer my assistance to Arjuna. I have an army of one million soldiers known as the Narayanas, all equal to me in battle. Let one of you take them and let the other take me alone. But I will not fight. Indeed, I plan to leave my weapons aside during the entire battle. O son of Kunti, what do you choose?"

Without hesitating Arjuna chose Krishna. Duryodhana could hardly conceal his joy. Arjuna's sentimentality had overpowered his reason, he thought. Smiling slightly, Duryodhana said, "It seems then that I am left with the army. With your permission, O Keshava, I shall now depart." After Duryodhana left, Krishna asked Arjuna, "Why did you choose Me, knowing I will not fight over My army?" "There is no doubt that wherever You are, there will be victory", said Arjuna.



This devotional spirit of Arjuna towards Krishna is an essential ingredient for understanding Bhagavad-gita,. Duryodhana was materially calculative, lacking understanding of Krishna's supremacy. Arjuna chose the Lord owing to his love for Him, whereas Duryodhana chose the Lord's energies owing to his desire to exploit them to fulfill his own selfish interests. Ask yourself this question: To whom will you be attracted? To someone who loves you and just wants to exchange love with you or to another person, who comes to you to flatter you and to get some money from you because you are rich? One is attracted to you, the other to your pocket. Similarly, devotees like Hanuman are attracted to the Supreme Lord Rama and His service; on the other hand, demons like Ravana are attracted to the Lord's energy, mother Sita. Thus such demons want the kingdom of God without God, and so they invite their own destruction.

The Lord tells us about the position of Arjuna in Bhagavad-gita (4.3) 'bhakto 'si me sakha ceti' 'Arjuna, you are My devotee and friend; thus I am teaching you the most confidential wisdom'. We have to approach Bhagavad-gita in the mood Arjuna did. Arjuna is the student of Bhagavad-gita. If we hear in the same mood, then we can benefit

from the study of Bhagavad-gita; otherwise our study will simply be an outward show with no tangible transformation of heart.

## **Requirements for Understanding the Bhagavad-gita**

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One should understand the following points before beginning to learn Bhagavad-gita:

### **Is the Bhagavad-gita Real or Symbolic?**

Bhagavad-gita is a real, historical dialogue between the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Shri Krishna, and Arjuna. This historical dialogue was recorded for the benefit of all future generations. Kurukshetra is a historical place that exists even today. All the characters of Mahabharata like Arjuna, Yudhisthira, Bhism, Duryodhana ,etc., are all real characters who truly existed. Modern scientists based on the research on excavations have proved that a personality called Shri Krishna existed 5000 years ago and that well-developed city Dwaraka also existed. The exhibits of such excavations can be seen today in the museums at Kuruksetra and Dwaraka.

One should never twist the actual truth and try to pull out some allegorical meaning. Some mundane commentators speculate that Kurukshetra is the body and the Pandavas are the five senses, Krishna is a liberated soul, and Arjuna represents a conditioned soul, etc. In India there are hundreds of commentaries of Bhagavad-gita interpreted by authors with no devotion but only mental speculation. Such commentaries full of speculation are lying in old libraries covered with dust, devoid of any practical applicability. Such misinterpretations have no potency to invoke the dormant devotion in the heart of living beings towards Shri Krishna. However, when Srila Prabhupada, Founder Acharya of ISKCON, presented ‘Bhagavad-gita As It Is’, within four or five short years thousands of people all over the world became Krishna conscious. Now over a million people worldwide are chanting Krishna’s names. This is the potency of presenting Bhagavad-gita As It Is without changing the purpose for which Lord Krishna presented the Bhagavad-gita.

### **Is the Bhagavad-gita Mythology or a Historical Account?**

The word ‘Hindu Mythology’ was coined by Indologists who wanted to divert the sincere Vedic followers away from their own religion to Christianity.

In 1876, Max Muller wrote to a friend, “India is much riper for Christianity than Rome or Greece were at the time of Saint Paul.” He added that he would not like to go to India as a missionary, because that would make him dependent on the government. His preference was this: “I should like to live for ten years quietly and learn the language, try to make friends, and then see whether I was fit to take part in a work, by means of which

the old mischief of Indian priest-craft could be overthrown, and the way opened for the entrance of simple Christian teaching.” Thus Indologists portrayed all the Vedic literatures as mythology to promote Christianity.

Srila Prabhupada writes: Agama, “which is coming from higher plane,” not manufactured here. Agama-purana. And Purana means the old history of the world, Purana. Purana, some of the modern scholars, they take everything as mythology, imagination. That is not fact. They’re real history. Purana. Purana means very old. Nityaù çäcvato yaà puräeo [Bg. 2.20]. In Hindi it is called Purana. Purana means old. The Puranas means the old history, not only of this world, but of the whole universe. [760817CC.HYD].

It is important to know that Ramayana and Mahabharata are real histories that took place and were carefully recorded. And the Bhagavad-gita, which forms a part of Mahabharata, also is a historical event that took place at Jyotisar, Kurukshetra, which is worshiped by millions even today.

### **Do not miss the goal of the Bhagavad-gita**

In modern times, people form Gita societies hold meetings, but they keep a lamp instead of Krishna’s picture. Shri Krishna spoke the Bhagavad-gita. How can there be no Krishna in a Gita society meeting? Even in ordinary affairs, if there is some political meeting, one keeps Gandhi’s photo, Nehru’s photo, because they are political leaders. Lord Shri Krishna is the Central point, Subject and Goal of Gita. Therefore Bhagavad-gita cannot be understood without reference to Lord Krishna.

The goal of the Bhagavad-gita is given in the Bhagavad-gita itself [BG 18.66]. There Lord Shri Krishna is ordering Arjuna to surrender to Him alone completely by surpassing all other lower platforms of good work and religious formalities. The Lord promises Arjuna that He will vanquish all his sinful reactions and deliver him from this world of birth and death. If someone does not come to this conclusion and goal after reading Bhagavad-gita, they have missed the essential point. If someone puts Krishna aside considering Him to be an ordinary person and thinks that the goal of Bhagavad-gita is to do social service, to become patriot of our nation, to become a good person who does not harm others, to become a Sanskrit scholar, etc., he is very unfortunate. He is like that foolish man who, after hearing the whole Ramayana asked the speaker, “Sir, how is Sita related to Rama?”

### **Who is Krishna?**

Krishna is not simply a mystic yogi, a learned man, a powerful man, a great politician, a powerful diplomat, and an ordinary cowherd boy, a living being blessed with great powers due to past karma, etc. Lord Krishna is not an ordinary man or even an extra-

ordinary man. He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead Himself. All great acharyas like Shankaracarya, Ramanujacarya, Madhvacarya, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and all great sages like Narada, Devala, Asita have accepted Shri Krishna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The Lord declares this in Bhagavad-gita, Arjuna proclaims it, and the Lord's pastimes such as Vishvarupa darshan and showing the universe in His mouth prove His supremacy. One should at least theoretically accept Krishna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead to understand Bhagavad-gita.

One cannot take up the reading of Bhagavad-gita like one would read a comic novel or a read-and-throw quick 'tips' book. The Bhagavad-gita is considered very valuable, read and appreciated universally because it is spoken by Lord Krishna, because He is God Himself. Bhagavad-gita is the song of God, containing valuable lessons, spoken by the Lord for the benefit of every human being to attain the ultimate salvation.

### **Relevance of the Bhagavad-gita Today**

Relative knowledge (like that of Science-- Physics or Chemistry) can become out-dated or modified with the passage of time. Scientists are struggling with their imperfect senses to defeat an imperfect relative truth and to introduce another better imperfect relative truth. But Bhagavad-gita is not like that. Bhagavad-gita carries the Absolute Knowledge, spoken by the Absolute Person, Shri Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who has perfect senses. He gave the same knowledge a hundred and twenty million years ago to Vivasvan as He mentions it in Bhagavad-gita (4.1). Today the same message is available without any change. So the knowledge of Bhagavad-gita is Raja Vidya, the King of all knowledge. It is beyond time, place and circumstance.

Despite the advancement of science and technology, there has been no change in man's taking birth, aging, getting diseases and dying, as these problems can never be solved by any amount of scientific or technological advancement. The amount of pain and pleasure that one has to experience is decided at the time of birth according to one's karma, and no one can escape from it without surrendering to the Lord. All modern electronic gadgets like mobiles, computers, TV, etc., have apparently brought great comfort to our bodies and senses, but we have not escaped the pains at all. The pains have now taken the shape of stress, tension, depression, inferiority complex, cutthroat competition for survival, mental diseases, etc., that are far more painful. Bhagavad-gita has solution to all these and is most relevant in the modern era. This is the reason why more than Indians, Americans, Europeans and people from all over the world are able to appreciate the process of Krishna consciousness. People have taken to Krishna consciousness and felt not only relief from sufferings, but have found great purpose to life and completeness in their aspiration for great achievements in life. Bhagavad-gita can elevate one beyond the material platform of caste, creed, color, nationality, language, age bar, educational

qualification, time, place, circumstance, etc., and help one get in touch with Shri Krishna and His divine instructions that can benefit the soul eternally.

### **Is it Scientific to accept the knowledge of the Bhagavad-gita?**

Bhagavad-gita is a Science. True religion is a Science. The knowledge given in Bhagavad-gita is understandable, applicable, experiencable and practically verifiable. This is confirmed by Lord Krishna—‘Pratyaksavagamam dharmyam’ [B.G.9.2] - Any religion without philosophical basis is sentimentalism; any philosophy without religion is mere mental speculation. Bhagavad-gita is a scientific presentation of philosophy and true religion.

World-renowned personalities like Einstein, Thoreau, Gandhi have expressed their deep appreciation for Bhagavad-gita. Gandhi says, “When doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and I see not one ray of hope on the horizon, I turn to Bhagavad-gita and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. Those who meditate on the Gita will derive fresh joy and new meanings from it every day.”



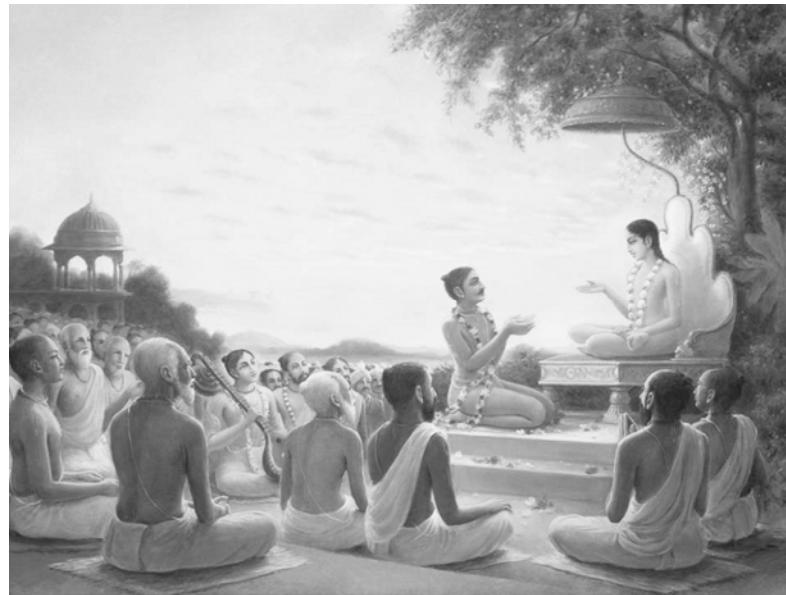


## Chapter 3

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# Qualifications of an Ideal Disciple

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## Qualifications of an Ideal Disciple

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kärpaëya-doñopahata-svabhävaù  
 pâcchämi tväà dharma-sammüòha-cetäù  
 yac chreyaù syän niçcitaà brühi tan me  
 çînyas te 'haà çädhi mäà tväà prapannam

### TRANSLATION

Now I am confused about my duty and have lost all composure because of miserly weakness. In this condition I am asking You to tell me for certain what is best for me. Now I am Your disciple, and a soul surrendered unto You. Please instruct me. [BG 2.7]

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### Material Qualifications are Useless in Solving Problems of Life

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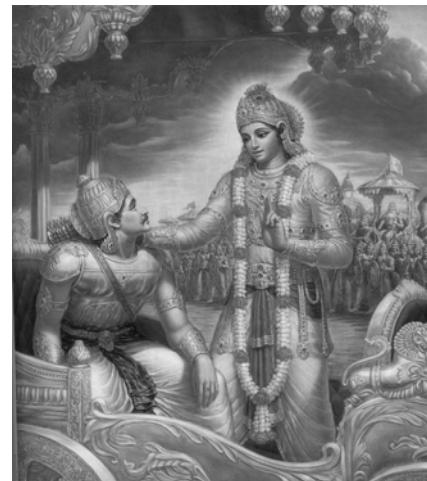
We have learnt that one needs a guru to understand God. Also the scriptures like Bhagavad-gita have to be approached in a devotional spirit. Now one, who is born of high parentage, vastly learned in scriptures, holding the post of king of a country, or one who is abundantly wealthy, does he still need to take shelter of a guru? What are the prerequisites for one to become a disciple?

Let us take the example of Arjuna who was famous for his Gandiva bow. He was the best of the archers and could shatter the hearts of his enemies simply by twanging his bow. He was best amongst the students of Dronacharya. He even defeated Lord Shiva in a dual fight and acquired the Pashupata weapon. Indra bestowed him with celestial weapons. In the martial arts exhibition, Arjuna displayed one celestial weapon after another. With the Agneya weapon he produced fire; with the Varuna weapon he produced volumes of water; with the Vayavya weapon he caused a great wind to blow; and with the Parjanya weapon he created a huge downpour of rain. Arjuna created land with the Bhouma weapon and with the Parvatya weapon he made a hill appear in the arena. Then, by invoking the antardhana weapon, he made all those things disappear. Arjuna had defeated even great Gandharvas like Citraratha and others. Thus even celestials could not stand in front of him. His senses were so controlled that even when Urvashi, a heavenly damsel, offered herself to him, he rejected her proposal, as he saw her as a mother. These are some of the special qualifications of Arjuna.



But just before the war, right in the midst of the battlefield of Kurukshetra, he became broken-hearted, indecisive, lacking confidence owing to confusion of religious principles. Who can solve such a crisis management problem? In his confused state Arjuna asked Lord Krishna, the Supreme Spiritual Master, to give a definite solution. He offered himself to Krishna as a disciple. He wanted to stop friendly talks. Talks between the master and the disciple are serious, and Arjuna wanted to talk very seriously before the recognized jagad guru, spiritual master of the whole universe, Shri Krishna. Shri Krishna is therefore the original spiritual master of the science of Bhagavad-gita, and Arjuna is the first disciple for understanding the Gita.

Like Arjuna, all people, though living in states like America or Japan, replete with all facilities of life, which are full of wealth and economically developed, are still suffering the problems of material existence. Arjuna was putting forward so many arguments based on knowledge of moral codes and religious principles, yet he was unable to solve his real problem without the help of the spiritual master, Lord Shri Krishna. Thus academic knowledge, scholarship, high position, bodily beauty, high birth, abundant wealth, are all useless in solving the problems of life.



When the king of the whole world, Parikshit, came to know that he had only seven days to live, he relinquished all the pleasures of the world, and at once took shelter of his spiritual master, Shukadev Gosvami. One should be ready to discipline oneself under the guidance of a bona fide spiritual master if one is really serious about purifying one's existence and returning back home, back to Godhead.

## Qualifications of a Disciple

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Just as qualifications are required for the *guru*, there are some requirements to be met by the recipient of Vedic knowledge also. Srila Prabhupada mentions three qualifications needed to approach a spiritual master in his conversation below:

**"...one should go to the spiritual master with Surrender and Question and Service—three things.** First of all, for acquiring knowledge we have to find out the suitable personality, and if we are fortunate enough to find out such suitable personality, then first thing is to surrender. And, after that surrender, there are questions. One must be very intelligent to put questions to the spiritual master. Without questions you cannot

make progress. So blind faith is never required, neither questions should be in a mood of challenge....Questions or answers should be just to understand. And that should be accompanied with service. This is the mood..." (660824BG.NY)

The following are some of the most important qualities of an ideal disciple:

### Humble Surrender

A disciple should submissively and humbly surrender to the spiritual master. One should consider oneself a fool in front of the *guru* and should put aside all preconceived notions learnt earlier from unreliable sources.

The ideal way to surrender to the spiritual master is the way in which Sanatana Gosvami, a great scholar and devotee of the sixteenth century, surrendered to his spiritual master, Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Sanatana Gosvami was a cabinet minister for Nawab Hussain Shah, who was then the king of the whole of Bengal. Due to his high position, Sanatana Gosvami had several magnificent palaces, fabulous wealth, multitudes of servants, and the finest luxuries of life. He had a highly respected lineage; he was born in a Saraswat Brahmin family. He was learned not only in Sanskrit, the traditional language of India, but also in many other contemporary languages, including Arabic and Persian. Yet, in spite of having such extraordinary material attributes, when he approached Lord Chaitanya to surrender his life to Him, he fell at the Lord's lotus feet in utter humility, with a straw in his mouth and a cloth around his neck.



Submitting himself to Lord Chaitanya, he inquired, "My associations are all abominable, and I am fallen, the most wretched of mankind. I was suffering in the dark well of material enjoyment, and I never knew the actual goal of my life. Indeed, I do not even know what is beneficial for me. Although I am known in the world as a great-learned man, a pandita, I am in fact so much of a fool that even I myself think that I am learned. You have accepted me as Your servant, and You have delivered me from the entanglement of material life. Now please tell me what my duty is in this liberated state. Who am I? Why are the threefold miseries always giving me trouble? And finally, tell me how I can be relieved from this material entanglement?"

This is the process of accepting a spiritual master. One should approach a spiritual master, humbly submit to him, and then inquire from him about how to progress in spiritual life.

Just as a seed planted in fertile land can germinate, and a potent man can impregnate a fertile woman to beget a child, a bona fide *guru* can enlighten the heart of a receptive

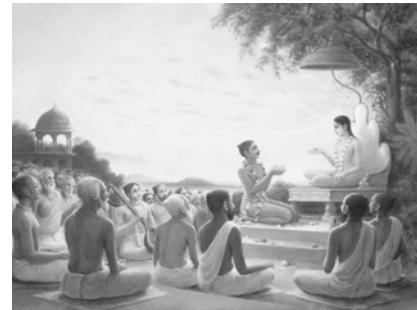
disciple with transcendental knowledge. But if the disciple maintains his own reservations, then such a disciple's heart is like barren land where the seed cannot sprout, or like a barren woman who cannot beget a child. An instructive story illustrates the position of such an unreceptive disciple.

Once a boy approached the best mridanga teacher in his town to learn how to play mridanga. The teacher asked him, "Do you know any beats in mridanga?" "Oh yes! I have learnt a few beats myself", the student replied enthusiastically. On hearing this, the teacher told him, "OK, your fees will be Rs 200/-." After some time, another student, who knew nothing about playing mridanga, enrolled and was charged only Rs 100/- by the teacher. When the first student came to know about this, he asked his teacher in great surprise, "Dear Sir, I already know some beats in playing mridanga. Then how is it that I am being charged more than this new student, who knows nothing about this art?" The intelligent teacher replied, "Your problem is that you have already acquired some hodge-podge about mridanga. So first, I will have to undo all the wrong beats that you have learnt earlier and then I can teach you the correct beats. But the other student is like a blank slate and is totally receptive to learn. Thus he is capable of learning all beats easily from the start. So I charged you more than him."

Similarly people in modern times are filled with many misconceptions about religion and they think they know everything. Without an open mind it is difficult for one to learn anything or achieve any tangible realization.

### Inquisitiveness

A disciple should be sincerely inquisitive about the ultimate goal of life. *tasmad gurum prapadyeta jijnasuh sreya uttamam* (*Shrimad Bhagavatam* 11.3.21). "Any person who seriously desires real happiness must seek a bona fide spiritual master and take shelter of him by initiation." A disciple must be sincerely inquisitive about the topmost long-term goal of life – spiritual welfare.



### Inquisitiveness about the short-term and long-term goals of life

Even animals like cats, dog and birds are inquisitive about food, shelter, sex, etc. So inquisitiveness about -- how to feed the family members in a star hotel, how to get a loan to build an independent bungalow, how to get potency to improve sex life, or how to intelligently get promotion in the office by flattering the boss -is not appreciated in the scriptures because such inquisitiveness only makes us more sophisticated two-legged animals.

The short-term goals of life (called *preyas*) are to gain wealth, name, fame, a posh apartment, a luxurious car, a promising career, etc. Even if achieved, such things are

temporary and will be taken away at the time of death. The long-term goal of life (called *shreyas*) is to become Krishna conscious and achieve the kingdom of God. The disciple must be inquisitive to know, “Why am I suffering? What is the meaning and ultimate destination of life?”

### **Grihastha and Grihamedhi**

In the revealed scriptures there are two nomenclatures for the householder’s life. One is grihastha, and the other is grihamedhi. The grihasthas are those who live together with wife and children but live a pure God conscious life for realizing the ultimate truth. The grihamedhis, however, have no knowledge of God or the goal of life, but simply waste the valuable human life in eating prohibited foodstuffs, enjoying sex life, sleeping long hours, working hard like donkeys to fulfill the burden of self-created duties that they take up to increase prestige in society, etc. Such grihamedhis derive pleasure in politicking, giving others trouble due to jealousy for one another, being attentive to selfish interests, and spending all their time counteracting the miseries that come one after another. They have much subject matter for hearing—political, scientific, social, economic and so on. There are different kinds of literature for different types of men of different mentality. Mostly the market literatures which attract ordinary men are literatures containing refused remnants of sensuous topics like affairs between cinema actors and actresses, poetry describing the sweetness of mundane relationship between man and woman, children, nature, politics, mundane sports, etc. Absorbed in sense gratification, due to a poor fund of knowledge, they set aside the question of the ultimate miseries of life, namely the miseries of birth, death, old age and disease, not knowing that the time is passing away.

The Vedas enjoin: ‘*tamaso ma jyotir gama*’ – “Go from darkness to light.” The darkness mentioned here refers to the material world, because the material world is an inherently dark place. Otherwise why would we need the sun, moon, electricity, fire, etc., for providing light? Therefore the Vedas urge a human being to go from darkness (ignorance) to light (knowledge), or from the material world to the spiritual world by inquiring about the ultimate questions of life.

### **Submissive Service**



A disciple should never be proud of his material qualifications like education, bodily beauty, wealth, high birth, etc. Such qualifications have no connection with spiritual life. In fact, they may even have an adverse effect like a heavy gold crown on the head of a drowning man, because they may increase the false pride of a prospective disciple and obstruct his spiritual advancement. So a disciple should never present his material qualifications in front of the spiritual master. For example, His Divine Grace Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati (spiritual master of Srila Prabhupada,

founder acharya of ISKCON) was highly educated; but he took initiation from Gaurakishore Das Babaji Maharaj who was greatly enlightened in the conclusions of the scriptures, though not highly educated.

Another example is of Narottam, a prince from a royal family who desperately wanted to be initiated by Lokanath Gosvami. Lokanath Gosvami was a humble and great Vaishnava and did not want to be prominently known to the public. He always kept himself in the background. Thus he rejected the request of Narottam. Every day Lokanath Gosvami found that, after he completed his morning duties, someone cleaned the whole place and kept it ready for the next day. He was curious to know who that person was. When he hid himself behind the bushes, he observed Narottam come with a broomstick and clean the place very humbly. Lokanath Gosvami was taken by surprise. He came out and exclaimed, "Narottam, how can you do this? You are a prince from a wealthy family! How can you do such a menial service?". Thus Lokanath Gosvami was pleased by the service rendered by Narottam and he at last agreed to initiate him. Narottam knew that the perfection of life is achieved not by wealth, scholarship, bodily beauty or high birth, but by the mercy of a Vaishnava devotee who is dear to the Lord. Thus Narottam earned the blessings of a great devotee by his submissive service.

King Prataparudra, the maharaja of Orissa, would humbly sweep the street in front of the Jagannath Rath cart in the mood of a menial servant. When he came to know about Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu from Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, he desperately wanted to personally meet Him and obtain His mercy. But Lord Chaitanya, being a sannyasi, refused to meet the king, who is always associating with wealth, women and prestige. The king was ready to renounce his post and wear the simple dress of an ordinary citizen if that was what was needed to get an audience with Lord Chaitanya. By the advice of Bhattacharya, the king at last could meet Lord Chaitanya at the Jagannath Vallabh gardens during the Rathayatra event. The king gave up his kingly attire and ornaments and wore the ordinary dress of a common man. He approached the Lord and massaged His feet and sang the prayers 'gopi gitam' for His pleasure. Lord Chaitanya was in great ecstasy of devotion and he asked the king, "Who are you?" The king replied, "I am trying to be the servant of Your servants." Thus King Prataparudra did not consider his high position in the eyes of the public; instead he always considered himself an insignificant servant of the Lord and His devotees. Thus he did not become carried away by the temporary posts and did not become arrogant or proud. This example of King Prataparudra gives us a clue to the submissive spirit of service needed to approach the guru.



The grihastha devotees worship the deity at home by bathing the deity, dressing the deity, offering foodstuffs, garlands, garments, ornaments, singing for the deity, etc. They also

invite sadhus and friends to their home and offer them the Lord's prasadam. They use a portion of their wealth to render service to the Lord and His devotees. By submissive service, one can make greater progress than by merely acquiring scholarship and mastery over scriptures to increase one's fame.

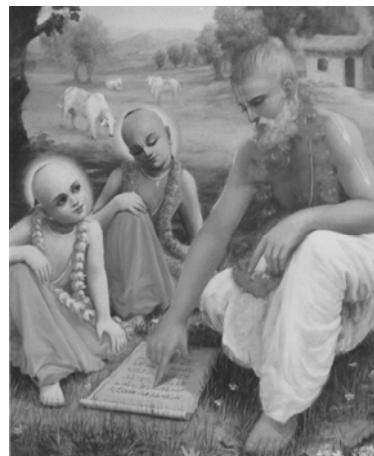
## Devotion to the Supreme Lord

The disciple should be a devotee of the Lord as told by the Lord Himself: 'bhakto 'si me sakha cheti rahasyam hy etad uttamam' [BG 4.3]. There are two classes of men, namely the devotee and the demon. The Lord selected Arjuna as the recipient of the great science of Bhagavad-gita, the essence of the Vedic literature, owing to his being a devotee of the Lord. But for the demon it is not possible to understand this great mysterious science. Arjuna accepted Shri Krishna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead and any commentary on the Gita following in the footsteps of Arjuna is bona fide. The demonic, however, do not accept Lord Krishna as He is. Instead, they concoct something about Krishna and mislead themselves as well as the general readers from the path of Krishna's instructions. A disciple must be a devotee of Krishna in order to be able to understand Bhagavad-gita.

## Unflinching Faith in the order of guru

The disciple must have unflinching faith in the spiritual master and must make his instructions his life and soul. The *Shvetasvatara Upanishad* (6.38) states: 'yasya deve para bhaktir yatha-deve tatha gurau tasyaite kathita hy arthah prakashante mahatmanah'— "Only unto those great souls who have implicit faith in both the Lord and the spiritual master are all the imports of Vedic knowledge automatically revealed."

Faith in the *guru* is the subject matter in a narration about Shri Krishna in the *Shrimad Bhagavatam* (10.80). While recalling His boyhood pastimes, Krishna recollects that, when He once went to the forest to collect firewood for his *guru*, Sandipani Muni, He and His friend were lost in the forest during a great rainstorm and spent the whole night wandering about. In the morning, when the *guru* and the other disciples finally found Krishna, the *guru* was very pleased, and he blessed Krishna to always continue to remember all that He studied in gurukul. The Supreme Lord does not need the blessings of anyone, but He sets the example of an ideal disciple for us to follow.



Krishna recalled the incident in this way: "Without the blessings of the spiritual master, no one can be happy. By the mercy of the spiritual master, and by his blessings, one can achieve peace and prosperity and be able to fulfill the mission of human life.

The faith described herein is not simply intellectual agreement on some theological matter. Rather, the disciple must completely surrender himself as the servant of the guru and take up the guru's instructions as his life's mission. After all, the guru acts as the disciple's savior. The disciple therefore owes a debt to his guru, who has personally lifted him out of conditioned ignorance and blessed him with the perfection of eternity, bliss and knowledge. In his turn, the guru must execute his duties humbly as a servitor of the Supreme and of his own guru in the disciplic succession.

The great sage Dhaumya had three disciples Aruni, Veda and Upamanyu. Once during a rainy day he asked Aruni to go to the field and block the water from entering the field. Aruni went alone and tried to stop the water, but the field was becoming overflooded. Seeing the situation, in order to fulfill the order of his guru, he laid himself down to stop the overflooding water. Later when the guru came with all the other disciples to see Aruni, he heartily blessed him for his surrender. Veda always fasted whenever his guru did not call him for honoring prasad. He laid on the floor, performed many austerities and was blessed by his guru. Upamanyu was stubborn and fat looking. One day Dhaumya rishi asked him, "How do you maintain yourself?" and Upamanyu replied, "I beg and eat well". The guru told him that the disciple should beg only for the guru and not for oneself. After some months the guru found his disciple still fat and inquired from him about his maintenance. Upamanyu replied, "I first beg and give it to you. Later I go separately and beg for myself." The guru admonished him that all the alms collected by a disciple is the property of the guru and not a farthing should be taken without permission. Later Upamanyu was found not going out much but drinking the milk from the goshala. The guru reprimanded him that the milk was meant for Bhagavan. One day Upamanyu was very hungry. He entered the forest and ate some leaves and became blind. He stumbled and fell into a well. He chanted mantras from Rig-Veda and invoked the presence of the Ashwini kumaras. They gave him a rice cake, but Upamanyu refused to eat it saying, "No, I cannot eat without giving it to my guru first." They told him that he was alone in the forest and that he might be very hungry. But Upamanyu firmly refused to disobey his guru. At that time, his eyesight came back and his guru blessed him.

The blessings of the guru are very important for the disciple to get the realization of the scriptures. A disciple can achieve the blessings of the guru by faithful service to the guru, by giving up one's independent mentality and by endeavoring to please the guru in strictly following his instructions.

### **Avowed Truthfulness**

A disciple should have a sincere desire for enlightenment and avowed truthfulness to the spiritual master. Birth in a particular caste, race, religion, etc., are not at all a consideration for becoming a disciple. If one satisfies his *guru* by sincere service and actually understands the Vedic conclusion, he receives initiation as a brahmana. A brahmana is a learned person who is responsible enough to enlighten others. In India there are many caste-conscious brahmanas, who insist that one cannot be elevated to

brahminical status unless he is born in a brahmana family. The brahmana-by-birth conception is decidedly non-Vedic. According to the Vedic standard, anyone can be elevated by training.

In this connection, there is a popular story in the Chandogya Upanishad about a boy named Satyakama, who approached a guru for enlightenment. "Are you the son of a brahmana?" the guru asked. The boy said that he didn't know who his father was. The guru then asked him to inquire from his mother, but the boy's mother frankly told him that, since she had known many men, she wasn't sure who his father was. The boy then returned to the guru and said, "My mother doesn't know." Pleased with the boy's honesty, the spiritual master concluded, "You are a brahmana."

There had been many great Vaishnava acharyas in our line of Brahma-Madhva-Gaudiya Vaishnava sampradaya like Narottam das Thakur. In modern times, Srila Prabhupada made many Western men into powerful Gosvami preachers to spread the mission of Lord Chaitanya all over the world. Thus one who is avowedly truthful to the guru, irrespective of his caste or nationality, can attain the shelter of guru and Krishna.







## Chapter 4

# Reincarnation – Fact or Fiction?

Times of India, Wednesday October 5, 2005, Page-10

## 'Miracle child' reunites with past-life parents

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: It was almost like living a miracle for a gujarati family based in south Delhi — a four-year-old angel called Manisha walked into their arms on the shraddh of their daughter who died about five years ago. Manisha, the little girl, claimed she was none other than their deceased daughter Suman, who died of typhoid at the age of 15 on December 14, 2000.

The child, who apparently has vivid memories of her last birth, instantly took to her past-life parents as her own. "She ran into our arms when she saw us. She pointed to me and said *voi nahi yeh mere papa hai*," says Chaudhary Kamal Singh, her father of the last birth. The family have removed the garland that adorned Suman's photograph in their living room and are ecstatic. The little girl is now living with them, along with her "new" parents like a big happy family.

Manisha was born to Rampal and Khilli Devi in a little village called Milakpur near Alwar, Rajasthan. At the age of two, just the time that she learnt how to speak, she apparently told her parents that she was Suman and not Manisha. "Voh kehti thi mera naam Suman hai, Manisha mai bolo," says Khilli Devi, her "new" mother, whom she was born to in this birth.

As she grew older, she apparently started recollecting more about her past birth and told her "new" parents that her father's name was Kamal and her mother was Santosh. "She told us she stayed in a three-storeyed house

located near a Kamal Mandir with three brothers. She would tell us colours of her school belt and tie — we couldn't understand her since she had not even started going to school then. She said that she died of typhoid," says Mallo, her "new" grandmother.

The news about the girl spread in neighbouring villages and she eventually got to her "old" parents through some common relatives who live in two villages in Rajasthan — Tejara and Tihli — which are about 30 km apart.



Manisha (Suman) with her new birth mother at her last birth home

Says Kamal: "Someone told us that there is this little girl who could be our Suman since a lot of details that she gave about her past life matched with us. I went to their village and she just ran into my arms calling me papa."

On September 27, she recognised them and on the first of this month, they brought her to Delhi. Since then, they have all been staying together. The two families plan to jointly bring up this "miracle child". "She doesn't belong to any one of us. She will get all our love," both her mothers say unanimously.



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## Reincarnation - Fact or Fiction?

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dehino 'smiñ yathä dehe kaumäraà yauvanaà jarä  
tathä dehantara-präptir dhéras tatra na muhyati

### TRANSLATION

As the embodied soul continuously passes, in this body, from boyhood to youth to old age, the soul similarly passes into another body at death. A sober person is not bewildered by such a change.  
[BG 2.13]

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### What Is Reincarnation?

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An intelligent person wants to know why he must suffer helplessly, die unwillingly and lose everything miserably, despite the best wishes and efforts of doctors, friends and relatives, and his own desperate urge to survive. Suppose a kidney or a heart is transplanted from someone else's body into mine, do I experience a little of the other person's nature mingling with my own? Absolutely not! When a person has cornea transplant he still remains the same person though seeing through a different lens. Like a pair of spectacles, the eyes may enable sight but they do not themselves see. Thus I can clearly see that I am different from my kidney, or heart, or pair of eyes, or the whole material body which is like a cage for the spirit soul that is residing within the body.

Our scriptures give us information regarding the nature of matter and spirit. The fundamental knowledge taught first is that we are not these bodies; we are the spirit souls. The body of the spirit soul is made of sat-cit-ananda (eternity-knowledge-bliss) and it is called the spiritual body. The material body is made up of matter: the five gross elements being Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether and the three subtle elements being Mind, Intelligence and False ego. Originally the living entity is a spiritual being, but when he desires to enjoy this material world, he is sent down from the spiritual world. When the spirit soul is sent to this material world, he has to be covered by a material body so that he may get acclimatized to matter to live in the material world, as when you wear winter clothes when you go abroad to a foreign atmosphere. **The spirit soul first accepts a body that is human in form**, but gradually, due to his degraded activities, he falls into lower forms of life-- into the animal, plant and aquatic forms. By the gradual process of evolution, the living entity again attains the body of a human being and is given another chance to get out of the process of transmigration. **This process by which a soul transmigrates from one body to another is known as Reincarnation.**

At one point of time reincarnation was considered to be a Hindu belief. In 1989, research analyst Walter Martin wrote: "the latest survey on reincarnation indicates that more than 58 percent of Americans believe in reincarnation." According to a survey published in 'World Statistics' (July, 1996), "More Americans believe in reincarnation than ever before." In the East, four out of five people surveyed embrace the doctrine of reincarnation with full conviction. In total, this accounts for well over half the world's population.

## Reincarnation: Views of Scientists and Philosophers

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Throughout the centuries, a surprising number of intelligent, non-fanatical thinkers have believed in reincarnation. "I am confident," says Socrates, "that there truly is such a thing as living again, that the living spring from the dead, and that the souls of the dead are in existence."

Ralph Waldo Emerson agrees. "The soul," he writes, "comes from without into the human body, as into a temporary abode, and it goes out of it anew...it passes into other habitations, for the soul is immortal."



Thomas Edison, Benjamin Franklin, Tom Paine, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman believed that the soul, the energy that animates the body, goes on to a new body when the present body dies.

One of the greatest modern psychologists, Carl Jung, said, "I could well imagine that I might have lived in former centuries and there encountered questions I was not yet able to answer; that I had to be born again because I had not fulfilled the task that was given to me".

One of the most celebrated scientists, Benjamin Franklin, wrote, "Finding myself to exist in the world, I believe I shall, in some shape or other, always exist."

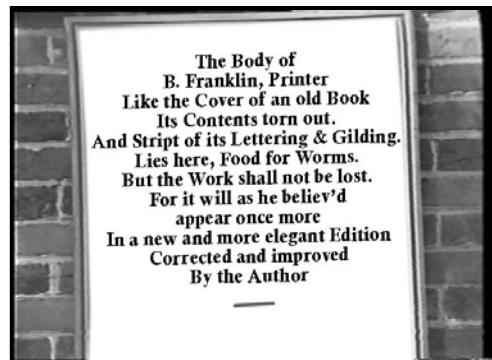
Thus reincarnation is attracting the minds of intellectuals and the general public in the West. Films, novels, popular songs and periodicals now treat reincarnation with ever-increasing frequency.

## Scientific Proof for Reincarnation

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People sometimes ask, “Who knows what is going to happen after death? Who has seen whether we are born again? Just forget this afterlife business and enjoy life now.” Here we will cite a practical proof for reincarnation based on the research work done in the field of spontaneous past-life memories in children.

Dr. Ian Stevenson, Carlson Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia, has conducted research in the field of reincarnation for over 30 years. Prof. Stevenson had accumulated over 3000 cases of this type in his files and over half of these were of the “solved” type (that is the child’s past life experience had been determined beyond reasonable doubt). In the 64 such solved cases from India, Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Turkey, Thailand and Burma – about which he has written extensively – the children’s parents or relatives were able to recall up to 60 statements made by the child, that were mostly capable of verification and which helped identify his or her past life. Over a 100 books and research theses have been written on the subject of reincarnation since the late nineteenth century.



Ian Stevenson has published his views in an article titled, ‘The Explanatory Value of the idea of Reincarnation’ in Vol.164, No.5 of ‘The Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases’, printed in the USA. The article is comprehensive and explains the following phenomena among many other things:

**a) Un-acquired and uninherited skills**

Writing of skills and talents in small children that were neither learnt nor inherited from the parents, the professor says, “I remember one child in Sri Lanka who was gifted at preparing thatch for roofs being able to put the palm leaves together very skillfully. She had never been trained in that; her family was several levels above the person whose life she was remembering and they didn’t bother with thatching; they had galvanized tin roofs”. He thus says that this skill of the child, born to a family of higher economic status, could not be explained without reincarnation, about which the child spoke from past life.

**b) Phobias**

Writing on phobias, he says: “Phobias and inhibitions are much commoner phenomena and in about 50% of cases the child has a phobia, sometimes expressed very young,

nearly always related to the mode of death of the person whose life is being remembered. For example, if the previous life ended in drowning, there would be a phobia of water, and if the previous life ended in a stabbing, there would be a phobia of bladed weapons. If it ended in shooting, there would be a phobia of fire-arms and so on.”

### c) Difference in the temperament of identical twins

Even though identical twins are physically born by the splitting of a single egg, they may have striking contrasts in temperament. Their difference in temperament cannot be explained on the basis of genetics because their bodies had resulted from the same genetic material. The difference in temperaments is because of two different souls reincarnated in two different bodies that are genetically identical.

When someone seems to have truthful memories of a former life, Dr Stevenson interviews him, the people around him, and if possible the people of the life apparently remembered, looking for a more ordinary, normal way to explain things. He looks for fraud - stories with holes in them and conflicting, unreliable reports. Only when there is no other possible explanation does he conclude that a case appears to be quite strong in establishing reincarnation.

## A Real Case History Of Reincarnation

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The case history of Sukla, a little girl from West Bengal is one of the 3000 in the files of Dr Ian Stevenson.

When Sukla Gupta was a year and a half old and barely able to talk, she used to cradle a pillow and address it as “Minu”. Minu, she said, was her daughter. Sukla, over the next three years, recollected her previous life events, which showed that Minu actually was her daughter in a previous life.

Sukla was the daughter of a railway worker in Kampa, a village in West Bengal. Sukla often talked not only about her daughter, Minu, but also about her husband, “the father of Minu” (a good Hindu wife avoids speaking of her husband by name). She also talked about his younger brothers Khetu and Karuna. They all lived, she said, at Rathtala in Bhatpara.



Sukla’s present family, the Guptas, knew Bhatpara slightly - it was a city about 11 miles south, but they had never heard of a place called Rathtala, nor of the people Sukla had named. Yet Sukla developed a desire to go there, and she insisted that if her parents didn’t take her she would go alone.

Shri K. N. Sen Gupta, Sukla's father, talked about the matter with some friends. He also mentioned it to one of his railway co-workers, Shri S. C. Pal, an assistant station master. Shri Pal lived near Bhatpara and had two cousins there. Through these cousins he learned that Bhatpara indeed had a district called Rathtala. He also learned of a man there named Khetu. Khetu had a sister-in-law named Mana who had died several years before, in 1948, leaving behind an infant daughter named Minu. Shri Sen Gupta decided to investigate further. With the consent of that family, he arranged for a visit to Rathtala. Sukla said that she could show the way to the house.

So, in 1959, when Sukla was a little more than five, Shri Sen Gupta and five other members of his family journeyed with her to Bhatpara. When they arrived, Sukla took the lead. Avoiding various possible wrong turns, she brought them straight to the house of Shri Amritalal Chakravarty, allegedly her father-in-law in her past life.

As the party approached, Shri Amritalal Chakravarty happened to be out on the street. When Sukla saw him, she looked down shyly, following the usual custom for a young woman in the presence of an elder male relative. But when Sukla went to enter the house she was confused. She didn't seem to know the right entrance. Her confusion however made sense; after the death of Mana (Sukla's name in her previous life) the entrance had been moved from the main street to an alley on the side.

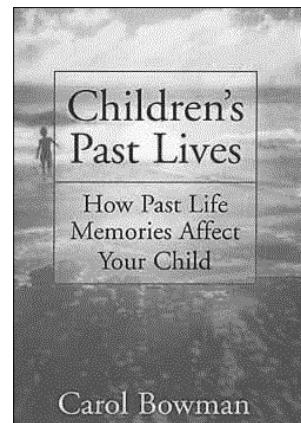
And the party soon found that Sukla recognized not only the house, but also the people in it, including those she said were her mother-in-law, her brothers-in-law, her husband, and her daughter. Inside Amritalal Chakravarty's house, Sukla found herself in a room with some 20 or 30 people. When she was asked, "Can you point out your husband?" she correctly indicated Shri Haridhana Chakravarty. Further when Sukla went to Mana's room, she showed the cot she used previously as Mana. And tears came to Sukla's eyes, when she saw her old sewing machine, the one that Mana had previously used.

Sukla and Haridhana Chakravarty were to meet again several times, and Sukla always longed for these meetings. When he was to visit her house, Sukla told her family to make him a meal with prawns and buli. She said that this was his favorite food. Her family did what she said and later found that she had chosen correctly. Sukla behaved toward Haridhana Chakravarty like a perfect Hindu wife. After he ate his meal, she would eat



whatever food was left on his plate, as a devoted Hindu wife would do. But she never ate food from the plate of anyone else.

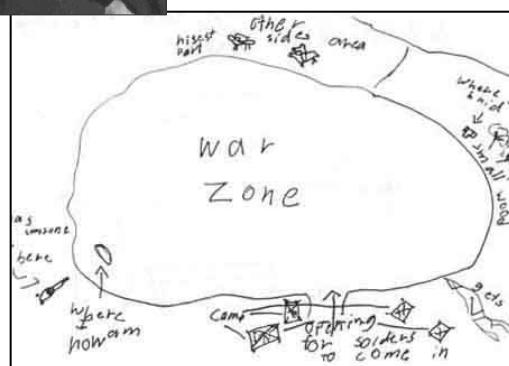
Most dramatic in Sukla's case were her strong maternal emotions towards Minu. From babyhood Sukla had played at cradling Minu in her arms, and after she learned to talk she spoke of her longing to be with Minu. Sukla's meeting with Minu had all the appearances of a tearful reunion between mother and daughter. Once Mana's cousin tested Sukla by falsely telling her that Minu, away in Rathatala, was ill with a high fever. Sukla began to cry frantically and it took a long time for her family to reassure her that Minu was actually well. Dr Stevenson remarks, "Although Minu was twelve and Sukla was only five, within this limitation, Sukla exactly acted the role of a mother towards a beloved daughter."



Thus after taking many other possibilities into account, Dr Stevenson submits that this case can be understood only by taking reincarnation into consideration. We have given another interesting reincarnation case below:



**Chase Bowman  
at the age (5 years)  
he had his first  
past life memories**



After I am scared  
I'm marching back to the  
battle field when I see  
a canon pass by on  
something like a cart pulled  
by a horse roared down  
very well!

next thing I know I'm behind  
a canon (look on the map)  
shooting them, I'm shot or  
something and I die! I can  
see myself floating over  
the battle field like on the  
map.  
Higher, Higher, I go into the  
sky.

3

## If We Have Lived Before, Why Don't We Remember It?

---

It is our nature to forget. For example, hardly any of us can remember exactly what we had for lunch even a week ago on the same day, though it is a certain fact that we did have lunch. So our not being able to remember an event is not the proof that it never happened. But consciously we can't even remember many things about our childhood in this very life. Is it then a surprise that we can't remember our past lives?

The Vedic texts explain that the souls come to this world to try to enjoy separate from God. And in order to be able to enjoy it is necessary that we forget what we did in our previous lives. Why forgetfulness is necessary for enjoyment can be understood from an example. If a near and dear member of our family has just passed away and if, at that time, a friend of ours calls us for a movie, will we go? We will be too much grief-stricken to even consider the idea of enjoyment.

Similarly if we were to remember all the dangerous activities and painful experiences of all our past lives, it would cause us so much anguish that we would be rendered incapable of all activites and enjoyments in the present life. For example, we might have met an excruciatingly painful death in a ghastly car accident, or we might have been a dumb animal, helplessly slaughtered by a merciless butcher, and so on.

If all these memories are not suppressed, how much pain will they inflict on our mind? Therefore material nature arranges to provide us with forgetfulness about our previous lives so that we may now freely go ahead with our desires for enjoyment. Of course, by some arrangement of God, certain thousands of souls amongst billions in this world are able to recollect their past life memories. This gives us a hint about the existence of reincarnation and can open our hearts to develop faith in the undefeatable truths mentioned in the Vedic scriptures.

## Reincarnation: Views of Different Religions

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### SANATANA DHARMA OR HINDUISM:

The vast body of Vedic wisdom that explains the subtleties of life in minute details is the foundation that leads to the unshakeable acceptance of reincarnation in the followers of Sanatana dharma.

### ANCIENT GREECE:

Among the ancient Greeks, Socrates, Pythagoras and Plato may be counted among those who made reincarnation an integral part of their teachings. Pythagoras claimed he could remember his past lives. Scholars summarize the Greek philosopher's complex version of the doctrine in ten steps: (1) divine origin of the soul; (2) the soul's fall; (3) duration of a cycle of births; (4) address to the souls awaiting reincarnation; (5) inevitability of transmigration; (6) possibility of release from cycle after three virtuous lives; (7) judgement in an underground realm; (8) judgement and condemnation of the wicked; (9) reward of the pious; (10) an ordered scale of human lives.



### BUDDHISM:

The idea of rebirth is implicit in Buddhism; the enlightened state (buddhi) say the Buddhists, cannot be achieved in one lifetime but takes many thousands of years. Further evidence of belief in reincarnation is found in 'The Jataka Tales' ("Birth Stories"), which, according to tradition, were originally told by the Buddha himself – 547 stories of the Enlightened One's past incarnations. The tales recount how the Buddha incarnated as a god (deva), as an animal, even as a tree in order to help souls in various conditioned states attain liberation. Reincarnation plays a central role in nearly all of the 547 Jataka tales.



### CHRISTIANITY:

There are many passages in the Bible indicating that Christ and his followers were aware of the principle of reincarnation. Once, the disciples of Jesus asked him about the Old Testament prophecy that Elias would reappear on earth. Jesus declared that John the Baptist, who was beheaded by Herod, was a reincarnation of the prophet Elias. Again speaking of John the Baptist, Jesus said, "*This is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear let him hear.*" [Matthew 11: 14-15].



Many early Church fathers, such as Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-220), Justin Martyr (AD 100-165), St. Gregory of Nyssa (AD 257-332), Arnobius (fl.AD 290) and St. Jerome (AD 340-420) were advocates of the principle of reincarnation.

Emperor Justinian (fl. AD 527-565), felt that with belief in reincarnation, Christians might become lax, thinking that they had more than one life with which to attain perfection. He banned the teachings of pre-existence of the soul from the Roman Catholic Church. During that era, numerous Church writings were destroyed. 'Give them one life only', he said, 'and then give them heaven or hell.' Justinian was sure



that this would hasten the Christians resolve to be good “Christians” and thus good citizens, loyal to their emperor.

#### ISLAM:

Islamic historian E. G. Browne, outlines three forms of transmigration accepted by classical Muslim thinkers: (1) Huhul, the periodical incarnation of a saint or prophet ;(2) Rijat, the immediate return of an Imam or any other important spiritual leader after death; and (3) Tanasukh, the ordinary reincarnation of all souls. The Islamists even claim that the Hindu God Krishna incarnated as Lord Buddha, and then as Mohammed, while others within the same sect believe that great teachers repeatedly incarnate for the benefit of successive generations.

### **Relevance of Reincarnation in Our Life**

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Most people feel that reincarnation, even if it is a reality, has little or no relevance to their lives. And even most of those interested in reincarnation study it out of idle curiosity, treating it as a mysterious subject meant for titillating their mind and intellect. But reincarnation has a great and immediate relevance to our lives.

Have you seen poor goats, standing in a queue in a slaughterhouse, being chopped one after another. Though these goats are about to be killed, they are satisfied simply with a little green grass being fed to them. Similarly, the whole world is like a slaughterhouse where everyone is being killed one after another. Yet, like the foolish goats, most people get intoxicated simply by getting a little sense gratification, and do not think about how to escape and go beyond their impending death. They pay no heed to the spiritualists. Only an intelligent person tries to understand the meaning of life by asking questions like – If reincarnation is a reality, can I decide my future body? And most importantly, if I am eternal, do I have to keep dying and being reborn again and again, or can I attain eternal life? If yes, how?

Perhaps one day scientific investigation will come up with answers to these questions. Isn't there any immediately available way to know the truth, and to avoid all this suffering? There is. Suppose you are faced with an unfamiliar but complex machine. You can observe it and try to figure out how it works. But the sure way to understand the machine is to learn about it from the person who built it. Similarly the vast universe around us is like a massive machine. The direct way to understand the machinery of the universe - including the subtle mechanism of reincarnation - is to learn about it from the person behind it - God. One should therefore learn the truth from the authorized scriptures, which are directly the word of God.

## **Individual or GD Task: Learning about Reincarnation**

*If you are in a classroom, then your teacher will make groups of 4 or 5 students; if you are reading this book alone, you can do it as an individual task. The story given below illustrates how the soul reincarnates from one body to another till he attains perfection. Read the story carefully. Each member of your group can read one title given below. Discuss the answer for the questions inserted in between the story amongst yourself and answer the questions on a separate sheet. Submit your answers along with the EBG Quiz answers. Remember to mention on the top of your sheet 'Lesson 8: Reincarnation – Fact or Fiction?, Individual or Group Task' along with your name or name of group members.*

### **Story: Three Lives of King Bharata**

Once the world was ruled by a very wise and experienced king named Maharaja Bharata. Being aware of the ultimate goal of life, in the prime of his youth, he renounced everything - his queen, family and his vast empire - and went to a place called Pulahashrama in the foothills of the Himalayas. There he lived alone in the forest along the bank of the Gandaki river. Each morning Bharata worshiped the Supreme Lord by chanting the hymns given in the Rig Veda. Later in the day he collected various fruits and roots, and as recommended in the Vedic scriptures, he offered these simple edibles to Lord Krishna, and then took them as his meals. By his constant meditation upon the Personality of Godhead, Bharata began to experience symptoms of spiritual ecstasy.

Q1: What was great about Bharata Maharaja?

Q2: How should a devotee spend his morning time?

### **Bharata gives shelter to the Deer**

One day while Bharata was meditating near the bank of the river, a doe came there to drink water. While she drank, a lion in the forest nearby roared loudly. The doe was pregnant, and as she jumped across the river in great fear, a baby deer fell from her womb into the swiftly flowing waters. The mother deer, trembling in fright, weakened and pained by the miscarriage, entered a cave, where she soon died.

As the sage Bharata observed the baby deer floating helplessly down the river, he felt great compassion. Bharata lifted the animal from the water and, knowing it to be

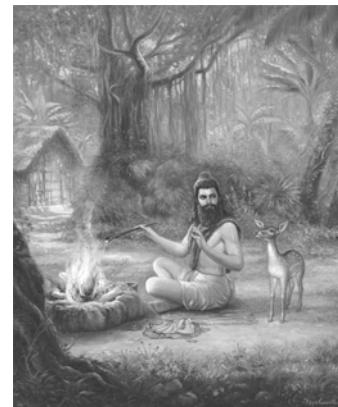


motherless, brought it to his ashrama. Because Bharata was self-realized, he saw all living beings with equal vision. He fed the deer with fresh green grass daily and tried to make it comfortable.

### Bharata becomes Attached to the Deer and Neglects Spiritual Life

Soon, however, he began to develop great attachment for the deer; he laid down with it, walked with it, bathed with it, and even ate with it. When he wanted to enter the forest to collect fruits, flowers, and roots, he would take the deer with him, fearing that if he left it behind, it would be killed by dogs, jackals, or tigers. Bharata took great pleasure seeing the deer leap and frolic in the forest like a child. Sometimes he would carry the deer on his shoulders. His heart was so filled with love for the deer that he would keep it on his lap during the day, and when he slept, the deer would rest upon his chest. He was forever petting the deer and would sometimes even kiss it. Thus his heart became bound by affection for the deer..

Being attached to raising the deer, Bharata gradually became neglectful of his meditation upon the Supreme Lord. He thus became distracted from the path of self-realization, which is the actual goal of human life. The Vedas remind us that the human form is obtained only after the soul undergoes millions of births in lower species of life.



**Q3:** What was Bharata's mistake in showing compassion to the deer?

**Q4:** Write down the different common distractions, especially in modern times, that take people away from going towards God.

This material world is sometimes compared to an ocean of birth and death, and the human body is compared to a solid boat designed to cross this ocean. The Vedic scriptures and the saintly teachers, or spiritual masters, are compared to expert boatmen, and the facilities of the human body are compared to favorable breezes that help the boat ply smoothly to its desired destination. If, with all these facilities, a person does not fully utilize his life for self-realization, then he commits spiritual suicide and risks taking his next birth in an animal body.

However, even though Bharata was aware of these considerations, he thought to himself, "Because this deer has taken shelter of me, how can I neglect it? Even though it is disturbing my spiritual life, I cannot ignore it. To neglect a helpless person who has taken shelter of me would be a great fault."

Q5: Can you think of some material situation in your life where you thought that sorting out a problem was more important than keeping your spiritual life steady? How did you escape from that situation?

Q6: What would you do if somebody or some situation terribly disturbs your spiritual practices?

Q7: Can you suggest a corrective action for Bharata's behavior?

### **Bharata searches anxiously for the Lost Deer**

One day, as Bharata was meditating, he began, as usual, to think of the deer instead of the Lord. Breaking his concentration, he glanced around to see where the deer was, and when he could not discover it, his mind became agitated, like that of a miser who has lost his money. He got up and searched the area around his ashrama, but the deer was not to be found anywhere.

Bharata thought, "When will my deer return? Is it safe from tigers and other animals? When shall I again see it wandering in my garden, eating the soft green grass?" The deer did not return till evening. Bharata became overwhelmed with anxiety, "Has my deer been eaten by a wolf or a dog? Has it been attacked by a herd of wild boars, or by a tiger who travels alone? The sun is setting now, and the poor animal who has trusted me since its mother died has not yet returned."

He remembered how the deer would play with him. He remembered how he would sometimes push the deer away from him, pretending to be annoyed with it for disturbing his worship or meditation, and how it would then immediately become fearful and sit down motionless a short distance away. "My deer is exactly like a little prince. Oh, when will he return again? When will he again pacify my wounded heart?"

Q8: Can you think of any scriptural example where a spiritualist got distracted from his spiritual practices and became attached to something material?

Q9: How can a person allured by Maya get out of her clutches?

### **Bharata dies thinking of the Deer**

Unable to restrain himself, Bharata set out after the deer, following its tiny hoof prints in the moonlight. In his madness, he began to talk to himself, "This creature was so dear to me that I feel as though I have lost my own son. Due to the burning fever of separation, I feel as if I were in the middle of a blazing forest fire. My heart is now blazing with distress."



While frantically searching for the lost deer along the dangerous forest paths, Bharata suddenly fell and was fatally injured. Lying there on the verge of death, he saw that his deer had suddenly appeared and was sitting at his side, watching over him just like a loving son. Thus, at the moment of death, the king's mind was completely on the deer. In the *Bhagavad-gita* (8.6) we learn, "Whatever state of being one remembers when he quits his body, that state he will attain without fail."

**Q10:** What do you understand from *Bhagavad-gita* (8.6)? Discuss its relevance to the life of someone in modern times.

**Q11:** If death comes to you the next moment, what body do you feel you might get? Answer this question based on what are the things that you're attracted to or attached to?

**Q12 :** Parents give names like Rama, Krishna, Govinda, Radha to their children so that they can remember the Lord always by calling these names. Can you think of other ways to remember the Lord?

### **King Bharata becomes a Deer**

In his next life, Bharata got the body of a deer. Most living entities are not able to remember their past lives, but because of the spiritual progress the King had made in his previous life, he could, even though in the body of a deer, understand the cause of his taking birth in that body, as stated in the *Bhagavad-gita* 6.44. He began to lament, "What a fool I was! I have fallen from the path of self-realization. I gave up my family and kingdom and went to a solitary holy place in the forest to meditate, where I always contemplated on the Lord of the universe. But due to my foolishness, I let my mind become attached to – of all things – a deer. And now I have justly received such a body. No one is to blame but myself."

But even as a deer, Bharata, having learned a valuable lesson, was able to continue his progress in self-realization. He became detached from all material desires. He no longer cared for the succulent green grasses, nor did he give a thought to how long his antlers would grow. He returned to Pulahashrama, the very place where he had practiced meditation in his previous life. But this time he was careful never to forget the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Staying near the hermitages of the great saints and sages, and avoiding all contact with materialists, he lived very simply, eating only hard, dry leaves. When the time of death came and Bharata was leaving the body of the deer, he loudly uttered the following prayer, "The Supreme Personality of Godhead is the source of all knowledge, the controller of the entire creation, and the Supersoul within the heart of every living being. He is beautiful and attractive. I am quitting this body offering obeisances unto Him and hoping that I may perpetually engage in His transcendental loving service."

Q13: What did Bharata lament about after occupying the body of a deer?

Q14: After acquiring the body of a deer what steps did Bharata take in order to be Krishna conscious?

Q15: What precautionary measures do you take to avoid becoming a prey to bad things that take you away from Krishna consciousness?

### **The life of Jada Bharata**

In his next life, King Bharata took birth in the family of a pure, saintly brahmana priest and was known as Jada Bharata. By the Lord's mercy, he could again remember his past lives. As he grew up, Jada Bharata became very much afraid of his friends and relatives, because they were very materialistic and not at all interested in making spiritual progress. Therefore, although he was very intelligent, he behaved just like a madman. He pretended to be dull, blind, and deaf, so that mundane people would not try to talk to him. But within himself, he was always thinking of the Lord and remembering His glories, which alone can save one from repeated birth and death.

Jada Bharata's father was filled with affection for his son, and in his heart he hoped that Jada Bharata would someday become a learned scholar. Therefore he tried to teach him the intricacies of Vedic knowledge. But Jada Bharata purposely behaved like a fool so that his father would abandon his attempts to instruct him. If his father told him to do something, he would do exactly the opposite.

Q16: Why was Jada Bharata afraid of his friends? What do you think you can do about your friends who are uninterested in spiritual life?

Q17: Can you think of two ways to escape materialistic association?

Q18: Why did Jada Bharata not want to become a Vedic scholar?

### **Jada Bharata's Inner Spiritual Advancement unknown to People**

Jada Bharata's nine stepbrothers considered him dull and brainless, and when their father died, they abandoned all attempts to educate him. They could not understand Jada Bharata's inner spiritual advancement. They made him work like a slave in the fields and his only wages were the small portions of unpalatable foodstuffs provided by them. Each day he was insulted and neglected by ordinary people, who considered him to be nothing more than a useless fool. But Jada Bharata never protested the mistreatment, for he was completely liberated from the bodily concept of life. Whatever food came his way, he would accept it and eat it, whether it was plenty or little, palatable or unpalatable. His body was as strong as a bull's, and his limbs were very muscular. Because his body was perpetually dirty, his spiritual knowledge and effulgence were covered, just like a valuable gem covered by dirt and grime.

**Q19:** Find out a verse in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Bhagavad-gita* where the equanimity of a self-realized soul is explained.

**Q20:** Think of a situation where you protested against someone mistreating you. Why did Jada Bharata not protest when he was mistreated?

### **Jada Bharata taken for Sacrifice to the Temple of Goddess Kali**

Once a leader of a band of dacoits went to the temple of the goddess Bhadrakali to offer in sacrifice a dull, unintelligent human being resembling an animal. Such sacrifices are nowhere mentioned in the Vedas and were concocted by the robbers for the purpose of gaining material wealth. Their plan was foiled, however, when the man who was to have been sacrificed escaped. So the chief robber sent his men out to find him. Searching through fields and forests in the darkness of night, the robbers came to a rice field and saw Jada Bharata, who was sitting on high ground guarding the field against the attacks of wild boars. The robbers thought Jada Bharata would be a perfect sacrifice. They bound him with strong ropes and brought him to the temple of goddess Kali.

Due to his complete faith in the protection of the Supreme Lord, Jada Bharata did not protest. His consciousness was, "My Lord, I am now surrendered unto You. I am Your eternal servant, and if You like You can kill me, or if You like You can protect me. In any case, I am fully surrendered unto You."

**Q21:** On what basis did the robbers want to offer a human to Kali? What was their purpose?

**Q22:** Why did Jada Bharata not protest when he was taken by the robbers to be killed?

### **Jada Bharata saved from the Robbers**

The robbers bathed Jada Bharata, dressed him in new silk garments, and decorated him with ornaments and garlands. They fed him a sumptuous last meal and brought him before the goddess. Jada Bharata was forced to sit before the deity. Then, one of the thieves, acting as the chief priest, raised a razor-sharp sword to slit Jada Bharata's throat so they could offer his warm blood as liquor to Kali. But the goddess could not bear this. She understood that the sinful thieves were about to kill a great devotee of the Lord. Suddenly, the form of the deity burst open and the goddess herself appeared, her body burning with intense, intolerable effulgence. The infuriated goddess flashed her blazing eyes and displayed her fierce, curved teeth. Her eyes glowered and she appeared as if she were prepared to



destroy the entire cosmos. Leaping violently from the altar, she quickly decapitated all the rogues and thieves with the very sword with which they had intended to kill the saint Jada Bharata.

**Q23:** What would you infer from this instance of Kali decapitating her own worshippers?

### Jada Bharata encounters King Rahugana

After his escape from the Kali temple, Jada Bharata continued his wanderings, remaining aloof from materialistic men. One day, as King Rahugana of Sauvira was being carried through the district on a palanquin resting on the shoulders of several servants, the men, who were fatigued, began to falter. Realizing they would need another carrier to help them cross the Ikshumati River, the king's servants began searching for someone.

They came upon Jada Bharata, who appeared to be a good choice because he was very young and as strong as an ox. Jada Bharata agreed to follow their order. But because he saw all living beings as his brothers, Jada Bharata could not perform this task very well – as he walked, he kept stopping to make sure that he did not step on any ants. Unaware of what was causing the sudden jolts, King Rahugana shouted, “What’s going on? Can’t you carry the palanquin properly? Why is it jerking like this?”

Hearing the threatening voice of the king, the frightened servants replied that the new man, Jada Bharata, was causing the disturbance. The king angrily chastised Jada Bharata, sarcastically accusing him of carrying the palanquin like a weak, skinny, tired, old man. But Jada Bharata, who understood his true spiritual identity, knew that he was not his body. He was neither fat, nor lean, nor thin, nor did he have anything to do with the lump of flesh and bones that comprised his body. He knew that he was an eternal spirit soul situated within the body, like a driver within a machine. Therefore, Jada Bharata remained unaffected by the king’s angry criticism.

Jada Bharata remained silent and kept carrying the palanquin as before, but the king, being unable to control his temper, shouted, “You rascal, what are you doing? Don’t you know that I am your master? For your disobedience I shall now punish you.”



**Q24 :** What was the philosophical understanding of Jada Bharata that led him to remain unaffected by the king’s angry criticism?

### Jada Bharata Instructs King Rahugana

“My dear king”, said Jada Bharata, “whatever you have said about me is true. You seem to think that I have not labored hard enough to carry your palanquin. That is true, because actually I am not carrying your palanquin at all. My body is carrying it, but I am not my body. You accuse me of not being very stout and strong, but this merely shows your ignorance of the spirit soul. The body may be fat or thin, or weak or strong, but no learned man would say such things about the real self within. As far as my soul is concerned, it is neither fat nor skinny.”

Jada Bharata then began to instruct the king, saying, “You think you are the lord and master, and you are therefore trying to command me, but this is also incorrect, because these positions are temporary. Today you are a king and I am your servant, but in our next lives our positions may be reversed; you may be my servant and I your master.”

Just as the waves of the ocean bring pieces of straw together and then push them apart, the force of eternal time brings living entities together in temporary relationships, such as master and servant, and then breaks them apart and rearranges them. “In any case”, Jada Bharata continued, “who is master, and who is servant? Everyone is forced to act by the laws of material nature; therefore no one is a master and no one is a servant.”

The Vedas explain that the human beings in this material world are like actors on a stage, performing under the direction of a superior. Onstage, one actor may play the role of a master, and another may play the role of his servant, but they are both actually the servants of the director. In the same way, all living entities are the servants of the Supreme Lord, Shri Krishna. Their roles as masters and servants in the material world are temporary and imaginary. After explaining all this to King Rahugana, Jada Bharata said, “If you still think that you are the master and that I am the servant, I shall accept this. Please order me. What can I do for you?”

King Rahugana, who had been trained in spiritual science, was astonished to hear the teachings of Jada Bharata. Recognizing him as a saintly person, the king quickly descended from his palanquin. His material conception of himself as a great monarch had been obliterated, and he fell humbly to the ground, his body outstretched, offering obeisances, his head at the feet of the holy man.

“O saintly person, why are you moving through the world unknown to others? Who are you? Where do you live? Why have you come to this place? O spiritual master, I am blind to spiritual knowledge. Please tell me how I may advance in spiritual life.” King Rahugana’s behavior is exemplary. The Vedas declare that everyone, even kings, must approach a spiritual master in order to gain knowledge of the soul and the process of reincarnation.

**Q25:** Why is the master-servant relationship in the material world illusory?

**Q26:** What made King Rahugana descend from his palanquin and fall humbly on the ground?

**Q27:** What is special about King Rahugana's behavior?

Jada Bharata then gave the Vedic knowledge about how the soul, because of material identification, wanders throughout the unlimited universes in different species of life. He also explained how the uncontrolled mind is the greatest enemy of the living being.

Jada Bharata then revealed his own past lives, "In a previous birth, I was known as King Bharata. I attained perfection by becoming completely detached from material activities. I was fully engaged in the service of the Lord, but I relaxed my control over my mind and became so affectionate to a small deer that I neglected my spiritual duties. At the time of death, I could think of nothing but the deer, so in my next life I had to accept a body of a deer."

### **Importance of Saintly Association**

Jada Bharata concluded his teachings by informing the King that those who desire freedom from the cycle of reincarnation must always associate with self-realized devotees of the Lord. Only by associating with exalted devotees can one attain the perfection of knowledge and cut to pieces the illusory associations of this material world.

Unless one has the opportunity to get the association of the devotees of the Lord, he can never understand anything about spiritual life. The Absolute Truth is revealed only to one who has attained the mercy of a great devotee, because in the assembly of pure devotees, there is no question of discussing material subjects like politics and sociology. In an assembly of pure devotees, there is discussion only of the qualities, forms, and pastimes of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is praised and worshiped with full attention. This is the simple secret by which one can revive his dormant spiritual consciousness, end forever the vicious cycle of reincarnation, and return to a life of eternal pleasure in the spiritual world.

**Q28:** What was the main cause of the falldown of King Bharata?

**Q29:** What is discussed and what is not discussed in the assembly of pure devotees?

**Q30:** What are the different ways you can think of associating with devotees?











## Chapter 5

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# Evolving Towards Perfection

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## Evolving Towards Perfection

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väsäàsi jéräni yathä vihäya naväni gähäti naro 'paräei  
tathä çarräei vihäya jéräny anyäni saàyati naväni dehë

**TRANSLATION**

As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones. [BG 2.22]

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### Material Body – Changing Dress for the Soul

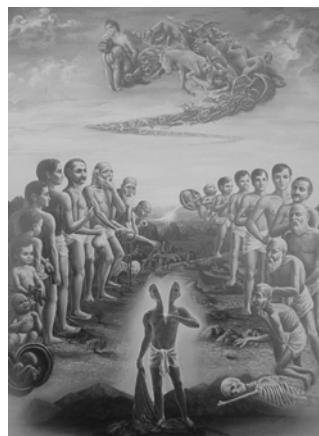
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**Reincarnation - Internal and External**

Can you believe that the same youthful body that a young man has now was, just 20 years ago, the body of a small baby that could be held in the two palms of his mother? Is it not a fact that this same youthful body is going to grow old and that there are going to be wrinkles, all the senses are going to become weak, and performing any activity is going to become difficult? In principle then, even within one lifetime, as the body changes from infancy to old age, the living being, or ‘atma’, actually passes through many bodies (like a child’s, a boy’s, a young man’s, and an old person’s) of various ages and levels of consciousness.

Thus the body changes, but the eternal living being within the body - the soul - remains the same. Biological science confirms this. In his book, ‘The Human Brain’, John Pfeiffer points out, “Your body does not contain a single one of the molecules that it contained

seven years ago.” When the movie frames are moved rapidly past our eyes at a rate of 16 frames/sec, it appears to be one continuous movie; we fail to notice that every frame is different. In the same way our body changes at every moment irreversibly, but because the change is continuous and gradual, we fail to notice it. **This movement of the soul through numerous bodies within one lifetime – something we can all verify by a little introspection – can be termed internal or continuous reincarnation.**



At the time of death the soul passes to a new body. The Lord explains this, “Just as the embodied living entity passes, in one body, from boyhood to youth to old age, so the living entity similarly passes into another body at death” (BG 2.13). “Just as

a person puts on new garments, giving up the old ones, similarly the individual living entity accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones" (BG 2.22). Lord Krishna further explains the principle underlying all reincarnations, "Whatever state of being one remembers when he quits his body, that state he will attain without fail in his next life" (BG 8.6). So the soul in a man's body could go into the body of an animal, a bird, an insect, a plant, and so on in the next life. **This journey of the soul into different bodies can be referred to as external reincarnation.**

### The Six Transformations of the Material Body

Every living body in this material world undergoes six changes: (1) birth, (2) growth, (3) maintenance, (4) production of by-products (offspring, chemicals), (5) diminution and (6) death. These changes happen to all living bodies, whether they be plants, animals or human beings. For example, a flower is born as a bud; it grows, remains fresh for two or three days, produces a seed, gradually withers, and is then finished. Sometimes people think that by scientific advancement man will become immortal. We cannot even stop these six changes in the body, where then is the question of stopping death?



### Did we evolve from Branches to Benches?

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Did our glorious ancestors evolve from apes? How did life originate in this world and from where has the universe sprung up? Origin of life and origin of the universe have always been the two challenging fields where scientists have not been able to give satisfactory scientific explanations. The theories that exist now are more of speculations than truth.

Vedic scriptures give vivid description of the origin of the universe as well as the origin of living forms. They mention that God created the first engineer of the universe, Lord Brahma, who in turn created all the species that we see in this world. The Vedas have one-lakh lakh verses that are not only voluminous, but deep and grave in their meanings, and were handed down from Brahma to Narada and to the acharyas down the line. We can see the wisdom of Vedic literature not only in spiritual but also in the material fields.

But the modern atheistic theory of evolution proposes a concocted idea that humans originated from apes, and that the primitive humans were 'stone age' men who were uncivilized, and that modern man is the most evolved and civilized man. This bogus theory is taught even in the elementary school books to destroy the faith of children in God, and to induce a feeling in them that the Vedas and religion are not meant for modern man but for some superstitious, narrow-minded people.

It is important for parents to know that we human beings have glorious ancestors like Manu, Sapta rishis and Brahma – we are not descendants of monkeys. Here we are presenting some simple scientific explanations to prove this fact. You will get more elaborate information in our book, ‘Your Secret Journey’. If parents can understand these simple arguments, they can teach their children the right understanding.

### **1) Fossil Records disprove Darwin's evolution theory:**

Fossils, which are the remains of ancient forms of life, are found as skeletons, bones, teeth or shells, preserved in the earth's crust. Living beings on earth today are not seen to be evolving into something else such as an ape changing into a human. Instead, they are all complete in form and distinct from other types. Darwin thought that fossils would at least provide the confirmation of one species evolving into another. If evolution were a fact, there should be at least some fossils with developing arms, legs, wings, eyes and other bones and organs. For instance, there should be fish fins changing into amphibian legs with feet and toes, and gills changing into lungs. There should be reptiles with front limbs changing into bird wings, back limbs changing into claws, scales changing into feathers and mouths changing into horny beaks. If living beings were created by God, then there would be no partial, unfinished bones or organs in the fossil record; rather all fossils would be complete and highly complex as living beings are today.

Darwin expected that if the fossils show a gradual evolution from one species to another, (like from apes to humans) then it would prove his theory. When the fossils were dug, what **the fossil record showed was just the opposite of what was expected by Darwin and his followers.** Professor of Natural Science John N. Moore reported, “...some 120 scientists, all specialists, prepared 30 chapters in a monumental work of over 800 pages to present the fossil record for plants and animals divided into about 2500 groups. Each major form or kind of plant and animal is shown to have a separate and distinct history from all the other forms or kinds! **Groups of both plants and animals appear suddenly in the fossil record.....** Whales, bats, horses, primates, elephants, hares, squirrels, etc., are all as distinct at their first appearance as they are now.” **They are all not evolving from any previous species.**

Zoologist Coffin stated, “To secular scientists, the fossils, evidences of the life of the past, constitute the ultimate and final court of appeal, because the fossil record is the only authentic history of life available to science. If this fossil history does not agree with



On what facts are the drawings of ‘ape-man’ based? Evolutionists answer: “the imagination” “pure fiction in most respects”, “sheer invention”  
— Science Diaest

evolution theory...what does it teach? It tells us that plants and animals were created in their basic forms. The basic facts of the fossil record support creation, not evolution." Astronomer Carl Sagan candidly acknowledged in his book 'Cosmos', "The fossil evidence could be consistent with the idea of a Great Designer."

**2) No one has seen one species change into another:** The fossil record also fails to give direct evidence of the gradual change of one species into another. Species are stable permanent forms. Evolutionists sometimes claim to have observed or caused the appearance of new species by breeding. **Breeding produces variations but not new species.** "The dog family has many varieties, but **dogs always remain dogs either by breeding or by mutation, pigs remain pigs and oak trees remain oak trees generation after generation**" (Scientific American). Thus the 'Science Digest' says, "No fossil or other physical evidence directly connects man to ape."



**3) Fossils show that multi-celled animals did not evolve from single-celled animals:** Darwin wrote of a gradual evolution from unicellular to multicellular organisms. However, Moore asserted in 1964, "Fossils of many-celled animals appear before remains of single-celled animals in the fossil record". This indicates that **many-celled animals did not evolve from single-celled animals.** According to evolution theory, species should appear in fossil records roughly in the order in which they evolved, such as fish to frog to reptile to bird to mammal to human. The oldest forms should appear in the lowest rock strata and the most recent forms should appear in the highest layers. The fossil records show that the supposed "ancestors" appear in rocks, which are higher up than their supposed "descendants". This proves that one specie does not evolve from another; all the organisms are distinct and created by God.

**4) Humans did not evolve from apes:** The date of origin of modern man according to Darwin is 40,000 years ago. But the records of the rocks show that man has existed for millions of years. The records of the rocks show that humans and apes and other animals co-existed for millions of years. Human fossils have been discovered that are much older than those of the earliest apes.

#### **5) How the Giraffe got its Long Neck (according to Darwin's evolution theory):**

The giraffe used to look just like other grazing animals in Africa but, while the other animals were content to eat the grasses in the fields and the leaves on the lower branches, the giraffe felt that the survival of the fittest depended on reaching up and plucking leaves from still higher branches. This went on for some time, as he and his brothers and sisters

kept reaching ever higher. Only those that reached the highest branches of leaves survived. All the other giraffes in the meadow died from starvation, all because they were too proud to bend down and eat the lush vegetation that all the other animals were eating. So only the longest-necked giraffes had enough food to eat. All the other giraffes starved to death. Sad story; don't you think? But that is the story of how the giraffe grew its long neck according to Darwin.

**Food for thought:** Why didn't the unsuccessful giraffes eat the grass on the ground instead of stretching their necks to get food from the trees? By the way, they don't get water from the tree. Then why couldn't they eat the grass from the ground? If the 'survivors of the fittest' were only the loonnnggggest-necked giraffes, then does that mean all the other animals without such necks died?

Picture the tragic tale: Dead giraffes lying about in the grass while the short-necked grazers such as antelope walked by them, having plenty to eat. Were their necks too long by that time to bend down to eat grass? No; every giraffe has to bend its neck to get water to drink. Darwin's giraffes died of starvation, not thirst. See for yourself what Darwin writes in his speculated thesis:

"So under nature with the nascent giraffe, the individuals which were the highest browsers and were able to, during dearths, to reach even an inch or two above the others, will often have been preserved... By this process long-continued...combined no doubt in a most important manner with the inherited effects of increased use of parts, it seems to me almost certain that any ordinary hooved quadruped might be converted into a giraffe."  
- Charles Darwin, '*Origin of Species*', p.202.

Biologist Luther D. Sunderland compares this tall tale with scientific information in '*Darwin's Enigma*' (1988), p.83-84, "It is speculated by neo-Darwinists that some ancestor of the giraffe gradually got longer and longer bones in the neck and legs over millions of years. If this were true one might predict that there would be fossils showing some of the intermediate forms or perhaps some living forms today with medium-sized necks. Absolutely no such intermediates have been found among the fossils. Evolutionists cannot explain why the giraffe is the only four-legged creature with a really long neck and yet everything else (without the long neck) survived. Many short-necked animals, of course, existed side by side in the same locale as the giraffe. Darwin even mentioned this possible criticism in '*The Origin*' but tried to ignore it."

Science and technology determine the values, assumptions and goals of modern society. While blaming religion for propagating blind faiths, atheistic modern scientists propagate theories like the evolution theory, which demand unreasonable faith in speculations that are unverified and often unverifiable.

At an individual level, a spiritual aspirant, based on this philosophical understanding, is convinced that he is not the body but the soul, and that there is a God who has created everything. What evolves is not the body, but the soul. When a student graduates from the first year class, he moves to another class for the second year, not that the first year classroom changes into the second year classroom! Thus apes continue to live in branches while students (of course human!) continue to sit in benches at school. Apes remain apes, humans remain humans, birds remain birds, reptiles remain reptiles, etc. What evolves is the soul, who is the driver of these different bodies, and he moves from one body to another after the death of a particular body.

## Perfect Knowledge of Evolution

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The Vedic texts explain that there is evolution – not of the body but of the soul. A lower bodily form does not evolve into a higher bodily form; rather the soul in a lower bodily form evolves into a higher bodily form.

“Originally, the living entity is a spiritual being, but when he desires to enjoy this material world, he comes down. First, the living entity accepts a body that is human in form, but gradually, due to his degraded activities, he falls into lower forms of life – into the animal, plant and aquatic forms. By the gradual process of evolution, the living entity again attains the body of a human being and is given another chance to get out of the process of transmigration. If he again misses his chance in the human form to understand his position, he is again placed in the cycle of birth and death in various types of bodies.”  
(Shrimad Bhagavatam 4.29.4)

The Padma Purana further states:

*jala-ja nava-laksani sthavara laksa-vimsati  
krmaya rudra-sankhyakah paksinam dasa-laksani  
pasavas trimsa-laksani manusya catur-laksani*

“There are 9 lakh species of aquatic life; 20 lakh species of plants and trees; 11 lakh species of insects; 10 lakh species of bird life; 30 lakh species of beasts, and 4 lakh species of human life.”

The meaning of "species" understood by biologists is different from the meaning implied here. The meaning used by biologists applies to the gross physical appearance or the gross morphological feature of the living material bodies. The Vedic meaning, however, which is derived after thorough and careful analysis, is based on the level of consciousness of the living being. For example, biologists say that all human beings belong to one species, whereas the Vedic literatures list 400,000 species. In other words,

there are 400,000 grades of human beings on different levels of consciousness from most degraded human beings to highly evolved demigods and pure devotees.

The varieties of life forms are products of the combinations and permutations of the three modes of material nature – goodness, passion and ignorance. The life forms are just like temporary houses or apartments of various sizes, shapes and colors, in which the eternal self or living being temporarily resides.



One may occupy one of these apartments according to one's ability to pay the rent, but all types of apartments nevertheless exist simultaneously. Similarly, the soul, according to his karma, is given the facility to occupy one of these bodily forms, but all the forms exist simultaneously. Therefore the body does not evolve; the soul evolves by paying the price of karma.

The biological forms, governed by the three modes, put a constraint on the qualities and activities of the living beings' consciousness. Thus the individual being in a tiger's body will desire to roar loudly and kill animals for food, whereas the living being in swan's body will desire to fly gracefully and swim in the lakes. Even in the same family we see differences caused by the activities of the three modes of nature.

### **The Mechanism of Reincarnation: What happens at Death?**

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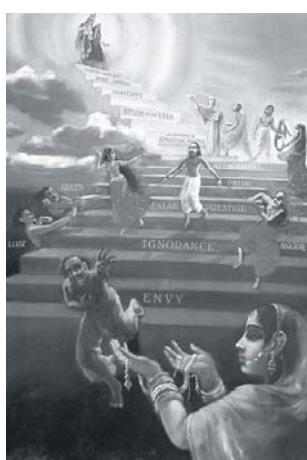
In the material world, the soul has two kinds of coverings – the subtle body and the gross body. Actually the soul enjoys through the subtle body, which is composed of mind, intelligence and false ego. The gross body is the instrumental outer covering. When the gross body is lost, or when it dies, the root of the gross body – the mind, intelligence and false ego – continues and brings about another gross body. Although the gross bodies change, the real root of the gross body – the subtle body – is always there. The subtle body's activities – be they pious or impious – create another situation for the soul to enjoy or suffer in the next gross body. Thus the subtle body continues whereas the gross bodies change one after another.



After death, the living being gets another body according to his:

- ☞ Desires
- ☞ Total impression on the mind and
- ☞ His karma phala or karmic reactions.

When one man was about to die he requested his physician to give him a chance to live four more years so that he could complete his planned affairs. This means that while dying he was thinking of his plans. After his body was destroyed, he doubtlessly carried his plans with him by means of the subtle body, composed of mind, intelligence and false ego. Thus he would get another chance by the grace of the Supreme Lord, the Supersoul, Who is always within everyone's heart: *sarvasya cāham hydi sanniviṣṭo mattah smṛtir jñānam apohanam ca* (*Bhagavad-gita* 15.15). In the next birth one acquires remembrance from the Supersoul, and begins to execute the plans or desires that one harbored in the mind in the previous life. **Thus the quality of unfulfilled desires play a vital role in what type of body one will get in the next life.**



While the gross body is cast off at death, the subtle body continues with the soul, life after life until it is completely purified. The mind in the subtle body is the storehouse of thoughts, unfulfilled desires, previous experiences, etc. There are many plans made by the living entity for keeping its body comfortable. **When the gross body is finished, the plans of the living entity are taken by the mind, and by the grace of the Lord, the living entity gets a chance to give these plans shape in the next life.** Our thoughts become words, words become acts, activities become habits, habits form character, character leads to culture. Culture becomes such a second nature, like a deep impression made on a wet cement, that it produces a particular type of consciousness – exploitative, critical, sarcastic, bullying, deceptive, selfish, egocentric, dominating or loving, caring, selfless, helpful, considerate, humble, simple, cooperative, tolerant, etc. One who is leading a life of sense enjoyment throughout cannot expect to think of the Lord suddenly at death, as his mind will be absorbed in thoughts of sense gratification. One who has regularly practised the principles of Krishna consciousness will find the mind absorbed in thoughts of Krishna and his devotees. **One's thoughts, words and actions in life produce a deep and total impression on the mind.**

As explained in the sixteenth chapter of *Bhagavad-gita* (16.14), “*ishwaroham aham bhogi, siddho aham balavan sukhi...*” a conditioned soul intoxicated by high birth, wealth, bodily beauty, learning or with no qualification, may be proud of his greatness, greedy for that which should not be desired and lusty for enjoyment. The cutthroat

competition of the material world, the wars between individuals, families, communities, religions, nations, etc., for assuming leadership over others is a practical exhibition of these tendencies. Not caring for the reactions of one's current actions, living beings indulges in all sorts of abominable actions. **Based on right acts and wrong acts one accrues karmic reactions or 'karma phala' ('work-fruit').**



So at the time of death the living entity, under supervision of higher authorities, is taken to another gross body. The process is just like air carrying fragrance [BG 15.8]. The process of transmigration of the soul is very subtle. According to the condition of the mind at the time of death, the minute soul enters into the womb of a particular mother through the semen of a father, and then the soul develops a particular type of body. The living entity descends to earth in the form of rain, then takes on the form of grains, and the grains are eaten by man and transformed into semen, which impregnates a woman, and thus the living entity once again attains the human form. In this way the living entity perpetually comes and goes on the material path. He may get the body of a human being, a cat, a dog or any other species depending on all these factors. This is basically the mechanism of reincarnation.

### Bodies are 'Tailor-made' to satisfy the Soul's Desires

The Vedas teach that a soul who aspires to enjoy in a particular way is offered a body with a set of limbs and senses appropriate to the desires from his previous life. The 8.4 million species, subdivided into various categories, give a materially tangible dense form to the subtle state of the consciousness of each individual living being. Thus the gross body is a manifestation of one's previous desires stored in the subtle body. A particular soul is awarded a human body; when he passes stool, he plugs his nose due to the unbearable stinking smell of stool. Another soul is given a pig's body; it finds the smell of stool welcoming and is impatiently waiting to grab the stool and eat it. Thus every living entity is offered a set of eyes, nose, tongue, ears, skin – suitable to fulfill one's previous desires.



***Our mental existence transforms into tangible form as soon as there is an opportunity.*** For example, there are waves transmitted by the TV station all around. Although we cannot see them with our eyes, if we have a TV set, we can switch it on and see those waves take on a form on the TV screen. In the same manner, depending on the unfulfilled



desires stored in the subtle body of the soul, the soul is carried by the subtle body to a particular womb where he eventually gets a gross body.

When a person goes to a clothes shop he can choose from a variety of clothes – shirts, suits, trousers, jeans, etc. Similarly there are 8.4 million species for the soul to choose from. The soul may acquire any of them to fulfill his desires. Even amongst human beings there are so many varieties - asuras (unregulated sense enjoyers), rakshasas (demons), devas (demigods), Gandharvas (demigods famous as singers), etc. If a soul wants to enjoy, enjoyment is available in millions of ways, in so many varieties, permutations and combinations. Lord Krishna is capable of fulfilling every soul's desires.

Think of any desire – if someone likes to sleep a lot, the material nature will give him a polar bear's body so that he can sleep for six months in a year without being ridiculed by friends or scolded by parents.



Do you know someone who delights in eating flesh and drinking blood? Nature will award him the body of a tiger.

Some people don't want to wear proper clothes over their bodies; they expose major parts of their body to draw the attention of the opposite sex. Nature awards them a tree's body, 'Take the body of a tree, and stand naked for many, many years.'

In this way each species represents a different way of enjoyment. But even in a particular enjoyment, there are subtler differences. There is a difference between the sleeping of ordinary bears and the sleeping of polar bears. There are street dogs that get beaten and driven away wherever they go, and there are pet dogs that live a life of luxury with their rich masters. These bodies are allotted to the living entities based on their desires and past karma.

Once the great sage Agastya visited king Indradyumna. When the king failed to offer the sage proper reception and neglected him, the sage cursed Indradyumna to become an elephant. Indradyumna had behaved like a dull stone and hence was cursed to become a dumb animal, an elephant. Similarly, once a Gandharva (a celestial singer) named Huhu playfully pulled the leg of the sage Devala from under water and got cursed to become a crocodile. Huhu behaved like a creature of water and hence was cursed to become a crocodile. Of



course, great sages have no malice when they curse someone. Their curses are indirect benedictions for those cursed. Because of these curses both Indradyumna and Huhu achieved the darshan of Lord Hari later.

It is important to note that independent of the external material body the soul acquires, the soul has a particular form called ‘svarupa’, which is his eternal form in the spiritual world. That form does not change when the soul moves from one body to another body. For example, a person may wear different types of gloves as per the requirement - surgical, electrical repair or boxing gloves. But irrespective of the glove he is wearing, his hand remains the same. Similarly, the soul may acquire different bodies as per his desires and activities. But, irrespective of the body he possesses, the soul’s original form - his svarupa - remains the same.

## **Human Form of Life – a Special Benediction**

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### **Human life: the junction to decide your future**

Lower forms of life such as plants, animals or birds do not suffer from sinful activities because they never violate the laws of nature. A tiger, for instance, does not commit sinful activity by killing its prey, because his body is meant to act in that way; it is properly equipped for that purpose. Karma phala, which determines the path one takes through various species or to other human bodies, is accrued only in the human form of life. The soul uses up his accumulated karma phala as he passes through the non-human species. Thus we can understand how the human form of life is like a cross-road where one has to clearly decide which road to take – the path to heaven, the path to hell, or the path to God.



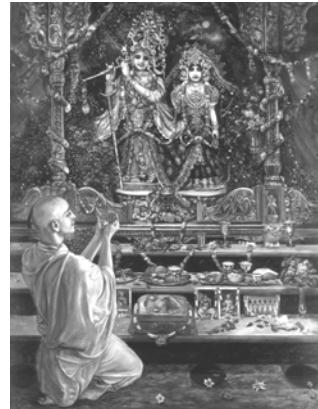
### **Human Life: the greatest good fortune in comparison to animal life**

The living entity falls from the human body to the animal kingdom owing to bad karma and animalistic propensities. After he has worked off his karma in the non-human species, eventually, he returns to the human platform, where he gets a new opportunity to carve out a new destiny. While the living entity is in the animal body, he loses the opportunity to make spiritual progress. Only in the human form of life can one chant the Lord’s holy names and make tangible spiritual advancement on the progressive march back to Godhead. On the other hand, living entities in non-human bodies are forced to act only by instinct and spend their time uselessly without making any spiritual advancement till they get a human body.

### The Lord created the Human form of life for one purpose only

"The Supreme Personality of Godhead, expanding His own potency, maya shakti, created innumerable species of life to house the conditioned souls. Yet by creating the forms of trees, reptiles, animals, birds, snakes and so on, the Lord was not satisfied within His heart. Then He created human life, which offers the conditioned soul sufficient intelligence to perceive the Absolute Truth, and He became pleased." [SB 11.9.28]

Only in a human body, the living entity is able to take vows such as climbing the Holy hill of Tirupati Balaji, developing detachment by giving away one's hair to the Lord, following brahmachari vows, fasting on auspicious days, having determination to follow certain rituals, control the senses and avoid irreligious practices, etc. You will never find a dog taking a vow of celibacy. When there is Maha Kumbhamela several crores of humans assemble in the early morning. What other species of life like cats, dogs or rats do you find assembling in such a way? You find only humans, because the Lord designed the human body to develop faith in Him, practice living with spiritual consciousness, realize the self, speak realized knowledge, take vows and prepare one's consciousness to return back home, back to Godhead.



God has specifically created the human form of life to facilitate the liberation of the conditioned soul. Therefore one who abuses human life prepares his path to hell. Thus, one must control the material senses and fulfill the real purpose of human life.

If one takes to Krishna consciousness, the Supreme Lord personally feels happy and gradually reveals Himself to His devotee. The Lord's material creation consists of the living entities and dead matter, which the less intelligent try to enjoy. The Lord, however, is not satisfied by those species that blindly strive for sense gratification without understanding their spiritual nature. We are suffering due to our forgetfulness of Krishna and the blissful situation of His abode. If we accept the Lord as protector and shelter and execute His orders, we can easily revive our eternal, blissful nature as parts and parcels of the Personality of Godhead. It is for this purpose that the Lord has created human life.

### **Story: ‘Born Again, but with what Gain?’**

The following story will help us understand how the living entity changes from one body to another based on his desires.

Once there lived a person named Kailash who was very attached to his house. One day the great sage Narada came to him and said, "Kailash, come with me. I am going to Vaikuntha (the kingdom of God). I will take you along with me."

Kailash replied, "Sorry sir, my children are very young. I have to take care of them. Maybe later."

Several years later Narada returned to him and asked, "Kailash, ready now?"

Kailash replied, "Sorry sir, now I have my grandson to take care of. Also everyone at home needs my guidance. I cannot come now."

When Narada returned after many years, he came to know that Kailash had passed away. While leaving he noticed a dog barking loudly at the doorway. The dog said, "O Naradaji, I am Kailash here".

Surprised Narada replied, "O Kailash, you have become a dog now! What are you doing here? Even now, it is not too late. I can take you to the kingdom of God. Would you like to accompany me?"

The dog replied, "Sorry sir, my sons are very careless with the wealth I acquired. I have therefore become a dog to protect that wealth from thieves." Feeling very sorry for Kailash's attachment, Narada went away.

After many years when Narada returned, he learnt that the dog had died. Thinking sadly that Kailash must have gone to some unknown body, Narada departed. When he was walking behind the house in the paddy field, a snake came hissing on the path. The snake said, "Narada, I am Kailash here, I am Kailash here."

Narada asked him, "What are you doing here in a snake's body, Kailash? Don't you want to come with me now? Even now it is not too late."

The snake replied, "Now I am happy that my sons have put all the money in a bank. But they are so lazy that they wake up very late in the morning. By that time, all the grains in this paddy field are either destroyed by elephants or stolen by neighbors. Therefore I have now been given a snake body to go round and round the field to protect the grains. I am very, very busy. I am sorry, I cannot come with you now also."

Seeing the pitiable condition of Kailash, Narada muni clapped his hands loudly, called the sons of Kailash and showed them the large snake living in their field. Immediately the sons of Kailash started hitting the snake with sticks. Kailash in his snake body tried to tell his sons, "I am your father and I am protecting your paddy fields for your sake. Why are you killing



me?" But the more he hissed, the more his sons hit him till he finally died. While dying the snake remembered Narada and in his next life he became a great devotee of Lord Krishna by Narada's grace.

Thus a person is impelled to accept one body after another according to his desires and actions. Such a person, being attached to his material plan-making business, spends all his time in bodily consciousness and goes on suffering in the cycle of birth and death.

### **Stopping the Miserable Ferris wheel Game**

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The nature of the spirit soul is sat-cit-ananda which means that the soul is eternal, full of knowledge and full of bliss. In contrast, the body is temporary and full of ignorance and suffering. Because of this incompatibility between the two, the soul, who is meant to be happy in an eternal blissful atmosphere, is never happy in this temporary miserable body. The soul has to repeatedly experience birth, old age, disease and death in different bodies.

Hence Sankaracarya has sung:

*punar api jananam punar api maranam, punar api janani jathare shayanam  
iha samsare bahu dustare, kripaya pare pahi murare*

"O Murari, Lord Krishna, I am repeatedly tossed in the waves of birth and death. I am forced to be born again and again and forced to die again and again. In this way I have been occupying the wombs of millions of mothers. Please kindly shower your merciful glance upon me and deliver me from this ocean of nescience."

In this way, the soul sometimes is damned to occupy a dog's body or blessed to get a human body, depending on his past desires and activities. This cycle of birth and death is like a Ferris wheel where sometimes you are at the top and sometimes at the bottom. Similarly the soul keeps on taking one body after another until he becomes completely purified and becomes a surrendered devotee of God. Lord Krishna says in Bhagavad-gita that 'whatever state of being one remembers when he quits his body, that state he will attain without fail.' [BG 8.6]. The necessary purification in order to return back to the Kingdom of God is very easily achieved in this age of Kali yuga by chanting the Hare Krishna Maha Mantra everyday on a regular basis:

Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare  
Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare









