

Srilakshmi Oppedini

**AWAKEN YOUR  
SPIRITUAL  
DESTINY**

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## Reviews

Srilakshmi Oppecini has been a sincere and exemplary spiritual practitioner on the path of devotion throughout her life. In this book she shares the divine gifts of her heart and will take you on a journey to *Awaken Your Spiritual Destiny*.

*Radhanatha Swami*

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“*Awaken Your Spiritual Destiny*” by Srilakshmi Oppecini offers serious spiritual seekers and practitioners a unique, entertaining, profound, and highly practical guide to a wonderfully lived life. Through a fascinating blend of philosophy, history, stories, meditations, and prayers, Sri Lakshmi weaves her way successfully through life’s great issues, goals, and challenges. I am grateful for her contribution.

*Dr. Howard Resnick,  
World renowned teacher of Indian studies, author and professor.*

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It was my honor to preview “*Awaken Your Spiritual Destiny*” by Srilakshmi Oppecini. I consider it well worth reading because it brings very deep philosophical, spiritual and theological truths into a simple, practical, and friendly presentation, which reads as if the author were talking to you in person — informally, but well-informed.

I hope many, many people will avail themselves of the rare opportunity to access deep and sincere Vedic conclusions in an uncommonly simple, transparent manner. We look forward also to reading more from Srilaksmi Jī in the future.”

*Vic Dicara*

*Author of The Great Big Crystal Ball in the sky and several books.*

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“Awaken your spiritual destiny”, manifests the distilled wisdom of a lifetime of integration – integration of seminal insights gleaned from time-honored wisdom texts illustrated with scriptural stories and practical anecdotes and vindicated with contemporary statistics and cutting edge research. Srilakshmi Oppocini takes us on an enlivening walk through a wide variety of subjects, all directed towards the destination of providing spiritual fulfillment of the deepest hunger of the human heart for lasting love.

*Caitanya Caran Prabhu*

*Author of over fifteen books on Indian spiritual wisdom  
and of Gita-daily, the world's only feature  
of a daily inspirational article on the Bhagavad-gita*

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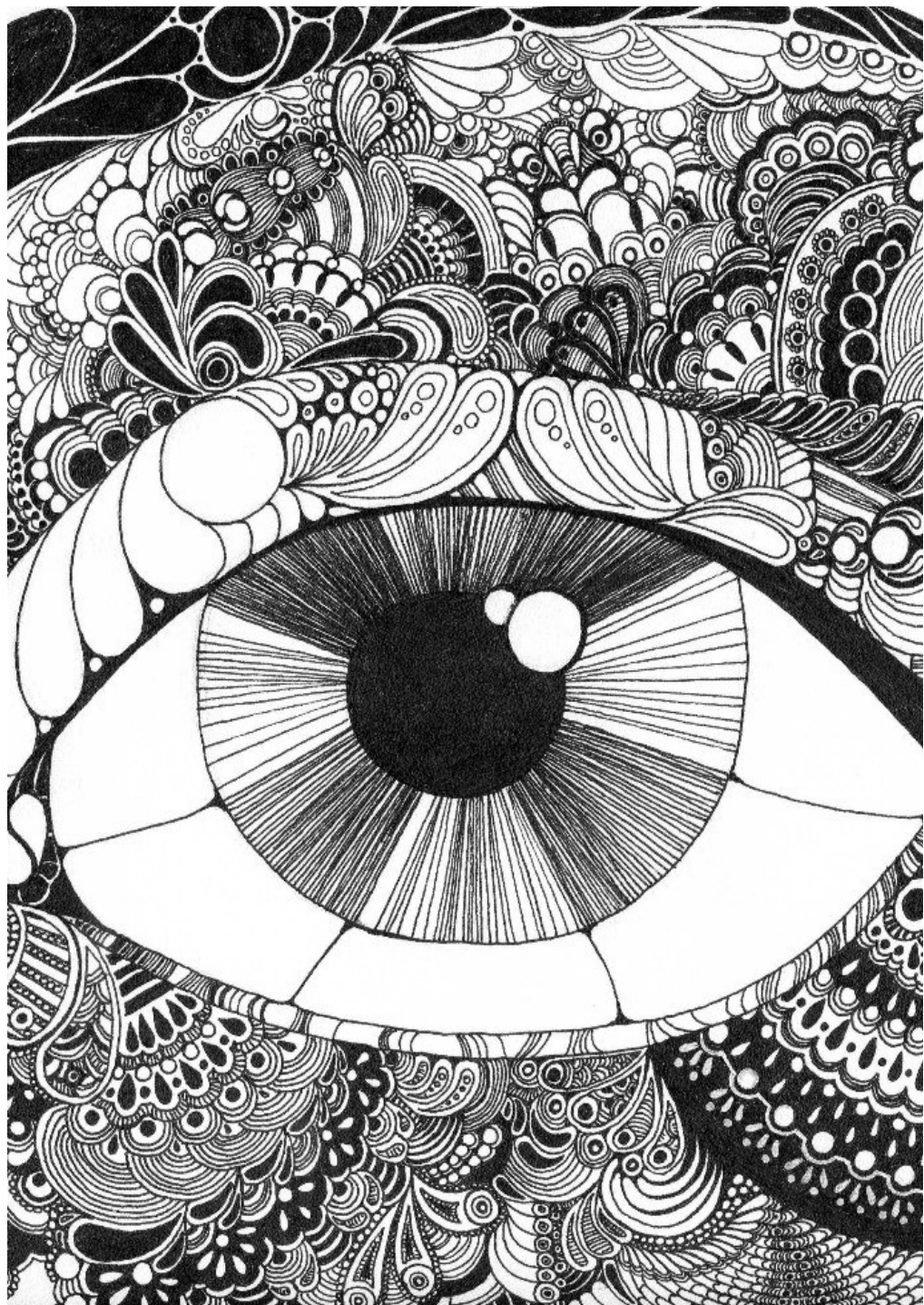
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# The Journey of Life

*“What is the value of a prolonged life, which is wasted, inexperienced by years in this world? Better a moment of full consciousness, because that gives one a start in searching after his supreme interest.”*

Sukadeva Goswami

**D**id we end up in this world due to destiny, or did we choose to be here? Does fate rule our lives, or our own decisions? If *karma* is preordained, then should we try to change anything?

To understand the interplay of our free will and faith we can compare the journey of our lives to a person’s journey on an airplane.

Alex decides to go on a trip by plane and books a flight from London to Madrid, Spain.

**Once Alex has boarded the flight, and the plane has taken off, there are certain things he cannot change:**

1. He cannot go back to his house and get his forgotten luggage.
2. He cannot change his flight or the end destination of the flight.
3. He cannot change the color of the seats, the window’s size or the width of the screen of the TV.
4. He cannot change the people on the flight.
5. He cannot change the menu as per his wish.

**During the flight, he can make choices that will affect his travel experience and even his future.**

1. He can relax, have a nap, and arrive fresh in Spain.
2. He can watch movies all the way.
3. He can read a book and enhance his knowledge, or even write a book.
4. He can start a fight with the flight attendant and get in trouble.
5. He can steal his fellow passengers' property and then the police might arrest him when he arrives in Spain.
6. He can damage the airlines' property; behave in an insane way and then upon arrival at the airport authorities might send him to a mental institution.
7. He can make friends with fellow passengers and establish a profitable business relationship or a lifelong friendship.
8. He can harm himself with any given object and end up in the hospital emergency ward.

From looking at this example, we can conclude that certain aspects of our lives are predetermined. How do we create a certain fixed destiny? A potter can mold clay into a particular shape and can continue to change the shape as long as the clay is moist. Once he places the pot into the oven to bake, when the pot comes out of the oven its shape is fixed. He can decide whether we would like to use the pot as a flower vase, or to hold water. He could also decide if we would like to leave it plain or paint it. At the same time, he has to accept the form of the pot as he created it.

Similarly, in our past lives we have molded our destiny by our thoughts, words and actions. Our death was like the fire, which

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fixed the shape of our future lives. We have created our destiny and right now, we are molding our future fate.

Such as, in this example, Alex did decide to take a flight, and he did decide to go to Spain, but once the flight had taken off, he could not change his decision any more. Likewise, every situation in our lives is a direct result of our past decisions and actions. *In spite of the fact that we might have been fully conscious of our decisions, we could not foresee all the consequences.*

Although we have already created our destiny, like the potters pot, we can still decide what we will do with it. The outcome of our lives is thus dependent on the interplay of our *karma* and our free will. Throughout our lives, we will face several difficult situations, which we might or might not be able to change. However, we can always decide how we will react, treat others, how much we will learn and strive to evolve our consciousness. Regardless of our situation, whether it is malleable or not, if we can learn to accept the challenges, we can rise above it and reach our highest potential.

We need clear discrimination to know in which situations we should be proactive to make new decisions and in which situations we need to be accepting and tolerant. *We can approach God through acceptance meditation for divine insight and guidance.*

## **Acceptance meditation**

### **1) Centering the self**

- Meditate on the interconnectedness of the entire creation; become aware of how you are connected to other people, living beings, and nature.

- Become aware of the air that you breathe – and contemplate

its source. Our breath, which is our primary life source, has its source in the Divine. As you breathe, feel how your breath is connecting you to its Divine source.

- Accept that all living beings are dependent, dependent on each other and dependent on nature. The Supreme Person creates all living beings and nature, so everything in creation is dependent on his Divine energies.

- As the Supreme Being is the source of all forms of life, every living being is part of the Supreme Person.

- The entire cosmos is, and is acting and moving by the desire of the Divine Creator.

- The Supreme Divinity's sole desire is to bring us back into His presence so we can have loving exchanges.

- Every situation, which evolves in our lives, is meant to facilitate a step on our journey home, to the spiritual realm.

- Cultivating this understanding, this consciousness, will bring us into a mood of surrender and acceptance.

## **2) Identify your challenge**

- Think of a situation, which you find disturbing.

- This may be causing you fear, anger, frustration, disharmony or a feeling of disconnectedness.

- When we experience these emotions, it is because we cannot relate a situation to The Supreme Person's divine plan for our lives.

- The situation seems to be independent and disconnected from a divine purpose and only causing us pain.

- Therefore we are resisting it.

- This is causing us to lose our sense of groundedness, centeredness, and equilibrium.

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- Now keeping the challenging situation in mind, return to and repeat the steps to centering yourself. You will experience how spiritual light, truth, and knowledge start to flood your troubled mind.

### **3) Acceptance**

- As I allow my eyes to open by spiritual vision, I gradually come to understand that the situation is exactly as it should be at this given moment.

- Everything which happens has a divine purpose, lesson and meaning.

- Everything and everyone moves around one center only.

- Moreover, every moment I am exactly at the right place in the classroom of the Divine, learning my lessons.

- When I learn to accept and embrace each situation in my life, I am opening the doors to unlimited joy.

- Let me remove my focus from all the external imperfections, which I want to change.

- Rather, let me turn my awareness inward and identify what I can change in myself, in my consciousness, my attitude and my perception.

Now in a sincere mood repeat the serenity prayer.

## **The serenity prayer**

*by Sacinandana Swami*

O Lord, allow me to peacefully accept everything this day brings.

Let me surrender completely to Your sacred desire.

Direct and help me during every moment of this day.

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If there is anything, You wish me to change,  
please grant me the vision to identify it  
and the inner strength to change it according Your will.

No matter what kind of news I receive,  
teach me to see it as Your message,  
even if its importance seems hidden.  
Moreover, if the great wave of my life should overwhelm me  
and my emotions and thoughts become scattered,  
please guide and direct me  
back to acceptance and faith  
in Your all-pervading presence and good will.  
Today let me remember love, service, tolerance, and forgiveness,  
and let me remain one with You –  
by remaining in harmony to Your arrangements and desires.

## **Who is on the journey?**

In our discussion regarding destiny and free will, we looked at the example of Alex who is going to undertake a journey. Our next question is; who is Alex really? Is he his physical body, his mind or could he be a spirit soul?

The Vedas, an ancient body of literature presenting timeless spiritual teachings, explain that we have three bodies, the physical, subtle and spiritual body. Which one of the bodies can we identify as the true self, undergoing a journey? The Bhagavad-gita compares the three bodies to a chariot with a passenger, driver and five harnessed horses. The passenger is the spirit soul, the chariot is the physical body, the driver is the intelligence, the reins are the mind and the horses are the five primary senses.

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Imagine you are in a chariot moving at a fast speed knowing that the driver is your enemy and the horses are untrained. How will you feel? Could there be any certainty of where you would arrive? If you were to undertake a journey, although you are not the chariot, neither the driver nor the horses, it is essential that you know how to relate with them. It is sensible to ensure the chariot is in working order, to know the charioteer to guarantee that he will take your orders, ensure the harness is in good condition, the reins are strong, and have the horses trained.

When you do so, your journey can be pleasant and you will reach your desired destination. We can learn from this analogy that although we are the spirit soul, which is distinctly different from the physical and subtle body, we need to understand how to relate with them. If we want to evolve our consciousness, we cannot allow our mind's lower desires to dictate our lives. *Instead, by employing our intelligence we should discipline our mind and become its master.*

In another Vedic analogy, the physical body is compared to a *yantra* (a machine) – in a modern equivalent could be to compare the body to computer hardware. If a person only has computer hardware, the screen, printer, keyboard, motherboard and hard drive, he cannot produce any work.

The person needs software installed in his computer – then he can produce work. There are a great variety of software programs ranging from the very simple which allows a person to write books, make slide shows, video clips to the very complex which enables one to design buildings, navigate outer space or building nuclear weapons.

Similarly, the human machine's hardware consists of nerves, muscles, bones, organs, lymph, arteries and veins, which are all created from material elements. If there is no life in the physical body it

remains inert and inactive. The subtle body, which consists of the mind, intelligence and false ego, is similar to computer software. As a wide variety of software programs exist, there exists a broad variety of subtle bodies, ranging from the uncomplicated mind of a dog to the advance mind of the nuclear scientist. The spirit soul is equal to the person who is the operator of the computer. The soul cannot directly interact with matter and thus uses the mind to bring the physical body to act.

From this analogy, we can understand that although we are the eternal spirit soul, when we are in the material world we want to know how to make the physical and subtle bodies function optimally. Even when we have the most advanced software, a virus can cause it to malfunction. Equally, the main obstacle that we face in reaching our optimal mental capacity is a virus called ‘lower desires’. When our minds are infected by this virus, even if they have extraordinary mental capacity, we will engage it for destructive or selfish goals. We can protect a computer from a virus by installing a good Antivirus program, which is permanently screening and deleting viruses. Likewise, if we desire to achieve our full potential, we need to protect ourselves and eliminate lower desires from our minds. *The strongest Antivirus program for the mind is daily spiritual practices.*

## **Game of the Mind**

Let us examine closer how the mind, false ego, and intelligence operate. We gather information through the senses, and then all the information is processed and classified by our minds. The primary function of the mind is telling us to accept or reject a situation, object or person. Normally the mind’s judgment is based on how much perceived pleasure can be obtained from accepting, or if we can avoid discomfort and pain through rejecting.



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This might sound like an over simplification, but if we analyze how we make a decision, we will find that we all operate in this way. However, people have very different opinions of what will make them happy and unhappy.

A person who is part of a religious extremist group is convinced that by sacrificing his life in a religious war that he will go to heaven, which will bring him great pleasure. An atheist is convinced that there is no God and that following religious morals will damage his psychological health. He is convinced that to follow his natural desires will bring him satisfaction. In the above cases the persons will act very differently, but their underlying motivation is the same; they are doing what they think will bring them pleasure.

Everything can appear beautiful or ugly depending on our mind's leaning. Just as the school bell sounds irritating at 9 am, but the same bell sounds melodious at 4 pm. Our mind can be compared to a person who has two posters: one with a big 'YES' and one with a big 'NO'. When our mind approves it brings up the big 'YES' with full excitement, and when it disapproves it throws up the big 'NO' in disgust.

If we eaves drop on people's casual conversations, we will mostly hear a correspondence of approvals and disapprovals. Sarah tells her friend Anna, "I like the new take away place. On the other hand, I dislike the parking because I love my car and I do not want to park it near the dodgy back street. But on the other hand, the guards there are good".

Anna responds, "I like the take away place, the pizza was good, but the music they played irritated me. Last time we went there the cute waiter served us. I think you are too paranoid about your car. You should just park it where there are good street lights and guards and it will be fine."

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We can identify that the mind is continuously categorizing, evaluating, and weighing up options. However, what makes the mind untrustworthy is that it is surprisingly fickle in its evaluating and decision-making.

Imagine it is a very hot summer day and you are ordering a huge glass of your favorite milkshake (if your mind is already rejecting the idea of a milkshake choose any other drink of your preference).

You find your desired flavor on the menu and your mind says 'YES' after you ordered it. It has arrived and the mind gives an even bigger 'YES'. While you are drinking it the mind is still holding on to the 'YES' card. Then as you take the last small sip, you see at the bottom of the glass... a huge dead cockroach! Then your mind will scream, 'NOOOOOOO!' What just seemed delightful a few moments ago now makes you feel like gagging... Has the milkshake changed? No, only your mind's reaction to the milkshake has turned 180 degrees.

We can envision another scenario to illustrate this point. Imagine you are on an exotic island with your life partner for a romantic holiday. You are watching the sunset over a golden ocean hearing the soothing sound of gentle waves.

The scene is idyllic; you feel peaceful and cannot imagine anywhere else you would want to be. You turn around and go to your island cottage to make something to eat. When you return you see that your partner has met a local sailor and they are sailing off into the sunset on a yacht... All of the sudden the sunset over the waves makes it look like hell has descended to the ocean.

Another uncanny aspect of the mind is that it will often demand one thing; and then if we yield to its demand, turn on us with resentment. Imagine you are having an intense week at work, which

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requires you to stay at the office for extra hours. As you walk by the shop, the mind sees your favorite snack. The mind says, "Yes you deserve it." You buy and go back to the office. Your mind says, "We are working so hard, we cannot continue without a snack, just have one." After you eat one piece, the mind continues, "One is an incomplete experience - have more."

As that is a completely valid argument, you submit to your mind and have a few more pieces. Then the mind says, "See now you have started snacking, so you might as well continue." So what do you decide to do? You obey the mind and finish the packet.

Then the mind responds: "Now we won't be able to stop. Let's go raid the office kitchen." Perhaps at this point you can resist your mind's commands; if you do, the mind complains, "Why do you NEVER let us have any fun. Suppressing all our desires is so unhealthy." If you do not resist and start raiding the office kitchen, devouring your colleague's snacks, the mind turns on you in a different way shouting: "Why do you have no self control? You are such a pig! What will your colleagues say about you?"

What can we conclude about the nature of the mind? When we have an unbridled mind, it will tempt and convince us to do things, which it will later condemn us for doing. It has immense power to sway us saying: "Yes, yes, I know we have tried this a hundred times before, but this time it will be different!"

As long as the mind's goal is to search out personal satisfaction, we cannot trust it, as it will demand something; achieve it and then reject it and demand the next. Following the demands of such a mind will only lead us down to an avenue of frustration. The Bhagavad-Gita teaches us that trying to satisfy our lower desires is like trying to put out a fire by pouring oil on it. For a moment, the flames will subside only to flare up with greater intensity.

In Bhagavad-Gita when Krishna tells Arjuna to control his mind, Arjuna replies, “The mind is restless and unsteady, turbulent, obstinate, and very strong. Oh Krishna and to subdue it, I think, is more difficult than controlling the wind”.

Krishna agrees with Arjuna but also gives a solution saying, “It is undoubtedly difficult to curb the restless mind, but it is possible by suitable practice and by detachment.” From this discussion, we learn that the mind by nature is active.

Therefore, Krishna advises that the mind has constant engagement and that we practice detachment. How can we engage the mind so that we use its energy constructively?

There is a story of a poor man who was walking along a deserted beach and found an exotic magic lamp. As he picked up the antique-looking lamp a genie rose from it and spoke, “*Oh great sir, good fortune has come about you now that you have found this lamp. Whoever takes ownership of this lamp has me eternally at their command to create all their dreams.*” The poor man was astonished at his luck and asked the genie, “*How many wishes do I have?*” The genie replied, “*Once you become the owner of the lamp you have unlimited wishes.*” The poor man was stunned – his whole life was about to change! But then the genie warned him, “*However there is one condition, once I have granted you your first wish, you have to keep me busy eternally, if I have nothing to do I will have to devour you.*”

After considering it for a few moments the poor man was convinced he could think of enough tasks to engage the genie for many lifetimes. Thus, he agreed to become the owner of the lamp and requested his first wish, “*I want an estate, with a palace, all the servants required to maintain it and endless wealth.*” The genie bowed down and three seconds later, everything that the poor man had wished for, manifested. Feeling excited the poor man said, “*Now do the same for*

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*all my family members.*” The genie disappeared and again returned after five seconds and said, *“It is done my master, give me the next command.”* The now rich man quickly thought about a task, which would keep the genie busy for longer and said, *“Provide houses in all needs for all the poor people of the world.”* He sighed and hoped the genie would be away at least for some hours. Still, the genie appeared after 10 seconds asking for another task.

For the rest of the day the man gave the genie every single task to fulfill all his, his family and friend’s desires. He barely had time to eat or talk to anyone, as regardless of what order he gave the genie, he would return after a few moments needing another order. It dawned on the man that he had gotten himself into a predicament. In between giving orders to the genie, he frantically searched his mind for a solution. When the genie appeared again he asked, *“Bring me the wisest man on earth.”* Within three seconds, an elderly, astute, but bright-faced man in simple robes appeared before him.

With great anticipation, he began explaining to the wise man the dilemma that he faced begging for a solution. In the meantime, the genie reappeared and reminded him, *“Master, you need to give me an order, or else I will need to devour you!”* The wise man smiled slowly and said, *“Ask the genie to find the tallest pole and bring it here”.* The man gave the command to the genie whom disappeared and returned after a few seconds with a towering pole. The wise man continued to speak, *“Now ask the genie to plant the pole in the ground near your house. Command him to move up and down the pole – continuously. When you need him, command him to come, give him an order and when he is done, send him back to the pole again.”*

The man sighed with relief, as he wondered why he could not think of the simplest solution. He gave the order to the genie and finally could peacefully appreciate his new wealth.

How does the story relate to us? Our mind is like the genie; it is constantly active producing more desires. When we know how to direct our mind, it is a great asset, and our friend, but when we fail to direct it, it becomes our enemy threatening to devour us. So what is the pole, which we need to provide for the mind?

It is the practice of meditation on transcendental reality by hearing spiritual sound vibration. When we direct our mind's energies towards spiritual sound, our minds become pure and we start to develop spiritual desires. We start to desire to take care of and serve others, to improve ourselves, to befriend other spiritually inclined people, and to learn more about God.

## **Dealing with the wavy mind**

If the mind is so restless and unpredictable, how can we convince it to meditate? The answer we find in the Bhagavad-Gita is that we should use our intelligence to control and evaluate the reactions of the mind.

To evaluate our minds we need some type of reference – we need to choose principles and values to live by. Those who desire to evolve can find principles and values in spiritual scriptures as The Bible, The Koran, The Kabalaha, and Bhagavad-Gita. If we study these sacred texts and hear discourses on it, we strengthen our intelligence with transcendental knowledge. In Bhagavad-Gita Krishna says, *“That the mind of those with steady intelligence is like the ocean, which is ever being filled but always peaceful.”*

What makes the ocean so powerful and profound? It is the depth of the ocean, which enables it to allow unlimited rivers to flow into it, while remaining unaffected. Likewise, when we connect with sacred scriptures we deepen our intelligence. Thus, we can remain unaffected by our lower desires or challenging situations.

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We can strengthen our intelligence when we become principle-centered, adhering to principles regardless of the resistance and arguments that the mind might present. Will we become miserable beings if we do not give in to our mind's demands?

Research in the field of 'Happiness studies' has clearly concluded that individuals who exercise mind control and lived disciplined, principled lives are far more satisfied than those who let their impulses dictate their lives.

Still, in order for us to be convinced to make our decisions based on principles found in scriptures, we need to have some *shraddha* (faith) in the scriptures. Is it rational to place our trust in the scriptures? If we did not place our trust in scriptures, could we independently decide how to live? Well, not exactly, unless we lived in a vacuum.

Our intelligence is always being molded, and if it is not by the scriptures it will be by the media, our friends, teachers and society. If we allow scriptures to mold our intelligence, we will experience continued growth. We are not meant to follow principles blindly; we should understand their value, how to apply them in each situation and the desired outcome.

For instance, all scriptures stress the importance of being truthful. If you find out that as a youth, your colleague had been involved in some criminal activity, you would be telling the truth if you informed all your other co-workers about his dark secret.

Would your action be in harmony with the essence of truthfulness? What do you want to achieve by being truthful?

The purpose of being truthful is to protect people from harm. Therefore, truthfulness should serve people or help to improve a situation. Hence, we have to evaluate when we desire to speak the truth, if the results will have a constructive outcome.

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We may agree that qualities as being truthful and compassionate are valuable, yet we may feel that it does not suit our identity. While it seems appropriate for a person working as a volunteer in Africa to be compassionate, what is stopping us from exhibiting it?

We might be thinking, “*I am a strong, result orientated, achiever. The success of my career is my first priority and to stay on top I am willing to ruin other people.*” Having full faith in our self-created misunderstanding, our false ego, we are unable to express compassion.

*Ahankara* (false ego) is the sense of ‘I-ness’ that we have and which determines how we relate to the environment, others, and ourselves. It makes us confused about our real identity, nature and purpose.

How does *ahankara* succeed to confuse us?

The process of developing *ahankara* is similar to that of an actor taking on a new role in a play. The more the actor identifies with the role, the more he will dress, speak, act, and feel like the character he is playing would. Some actors can become so caught up in the roles that they are playing, that they start forgetting who they really are, instead believing that they are the character.

Likewise, we all have our designated parts we have to play on the stage of life. It is our *dharma*, our duty, to play a certain role so that the drama of our lives can unfold, as it should. Nevertheless, we should always remember that we are wearing costumes and are performing, and off stage, we have a real identity - that of a spiritual being.

The family and society we are born in will have specific ideas and expectations of what we should be. The individual feels the pressure to conform to these external forces shaping his identity, but has a choice to either adopt or reject the ideas. When we internalize and accept external identities as our true selves, we are creating our false ego.



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From the moment children come into this world, their parents start imposing expectations on them. When a mother has a baby girl, she will buy her clothes printed with flowers, give her female dolls to play with and tell her how beautiful she will be when she grows up. On the other hand, if a mother has a boy, she will buy him earthy colored clothing, give him cars and trucks to play with, and tell him how strong and competent he will be when he is older. As we grow up, we are exposed to more options of identities, roles and images that we can have.

An individual might for instance be convinced that, “*I am mixed race, I am a Japanese citizen, I am an intellectual, I am young and attractive and I am wealthy.*” While all these statements may be true, they will not be true in a hundred years. Therefore, we can classify them as relative truths; they are dependent on a particular time, place and circumstances. Many of us make all our decisions based on similar relative truths about ourselves. We are convinced that we are a particular gender, nationality, class and act accordingly. However, if we are convinced that we are spiritual beings, who are eternal by nature, we will exist even after hundreds of years. For this reason, we face a problem if we base our decisions on relative truths.

Imagine your friend told you on Tuesday that there was a special sale on for the week at your favorite bookshop, but then you went to the mall and saw no sale. Upon calling your friend, she explained that the sale was only for 1 hour on Monday. There was some truth in what she said – but for all practical purposes, it had neither value nor relevance to you. If we consider a broader view of time, accepting that we have had numerous lives, then the relative truths of this lifetime too become insignificant and irrelevant. We can conclude that basing our identity and decisions on relative truths will not lead us to our highest potential.

If we want to grow, we need to identify absolute truths, releasing our ego from all the misidentification breaking free from *ahankara*. What is the real ‘I-ness’ of the ego?

*“I am a divine being, an eternal part of God, radiating with complete love and knowledge.”* How do we treat the disease of the ego and become free from *ahankara*? Regardless of the resentment, rebellion and resistance of the false ego, we can engage in acts which reaffirm our relationship with the Divine, such as prayer, meditation, and visiting sacred places. When we follow *sadhana* (spiritual practices), we will experience *ahankara* gradually receding.

If we succeed in identifying the *jiva-atma* as the person who is on the journey, realizing that the physical and subtle bodies are only vehicles, then we will prioritize our spiritual growth. As long as we misidentify the physical and subtle body as the real self, we will be like a driver who is more concerned about his car’s maintenance than where he is driving too. Of course, the maintenance of the car is important, but only as much as it enables us to continue towards our destination. What happens when people who are obsessed about their cars, instead of their journey or end destination surround us? We can easily develop the same mentality, even forgetting that we should be going somewhere. However, if we can overcome this mindset, and fix our minds on our journey, the universe will facilitate our desire to evolve and we can experience exponential spiritual growth.

## **Where are we on the journey?**

Human life is given the opportunity for the spirit soul’s consciousness to be expressing it at its highest level. When a soul inhabits a human body – it is like an opportunity to climb the highest mountain. It is not that we have already arrived on the mountaintop, but if we

## *The Journey of Life*

climbed, we could get there. In each form of life, the *jiva-atma* experiences a journey, but in the human form of life, the *jiva-atma* can experience a pilgrimage. What makes a pilgrimage different from another journey or traveling?

A pilgrimage is a journey that we undertake in search of spiritual significance. When we go on pilgrimage, we leave behind for some time, our occupation, family, and friends. We exclusively dedicate our time to go deeper into our spirituality.

When Alex reaches Spain, he decides that he wants to visit the Shrine of St James in Santiago de Compostela. To reach the shrine he needs to undertake the famous pilgrimage, El Camino de Santiago, in Spain for which he will get a special pilgrimage passport. Upon reaching the shrine of St James, he can receive the Compostela, a certificate of completion, in his pilgrimage passport only if he had walked at least 100 km of the route. In addition, the passport must contain certain stamps of towns, which he had to pass through on his journey.

He will begin his journey in France and he will walk through the towns of St Jean Pied de Port, Roncesvalles Pamplona, Burgos, Leon, and Ponferrada to reach Santiago de Compostela. He plans his journey well by finding a detailed map; planning how far he will walk everyday, deciding whether he will walk or cycle, identifying landmarks that he should pass on his way, and he learns basic Spanish.

Our spiritual growth is like a decision we make to go on pilgrimage. We need to identify exactly what state of consciousness we desire to reach. Do we want to be a wealthy religious person, do we want to gain spiritual understanding of the entire cosmos, or do we want to experience the ecstasy of pure Love of God? Then we need to find out what is the route and the process we need to follow to reach it. We may try to create our own road, but it would be wiser to consult scriptures to find out which spiritual paths people have taken in the past.

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Once we have found our path, we need to know which *sadhana* we will follow so that we will move forward. When we deeply internalize the meaning and purpose of our spiritual practices, we will reap the full benefit. We need to make a commitment to engage with these practices daily, have eagerness to transform and willingness to shed layers of misperception.

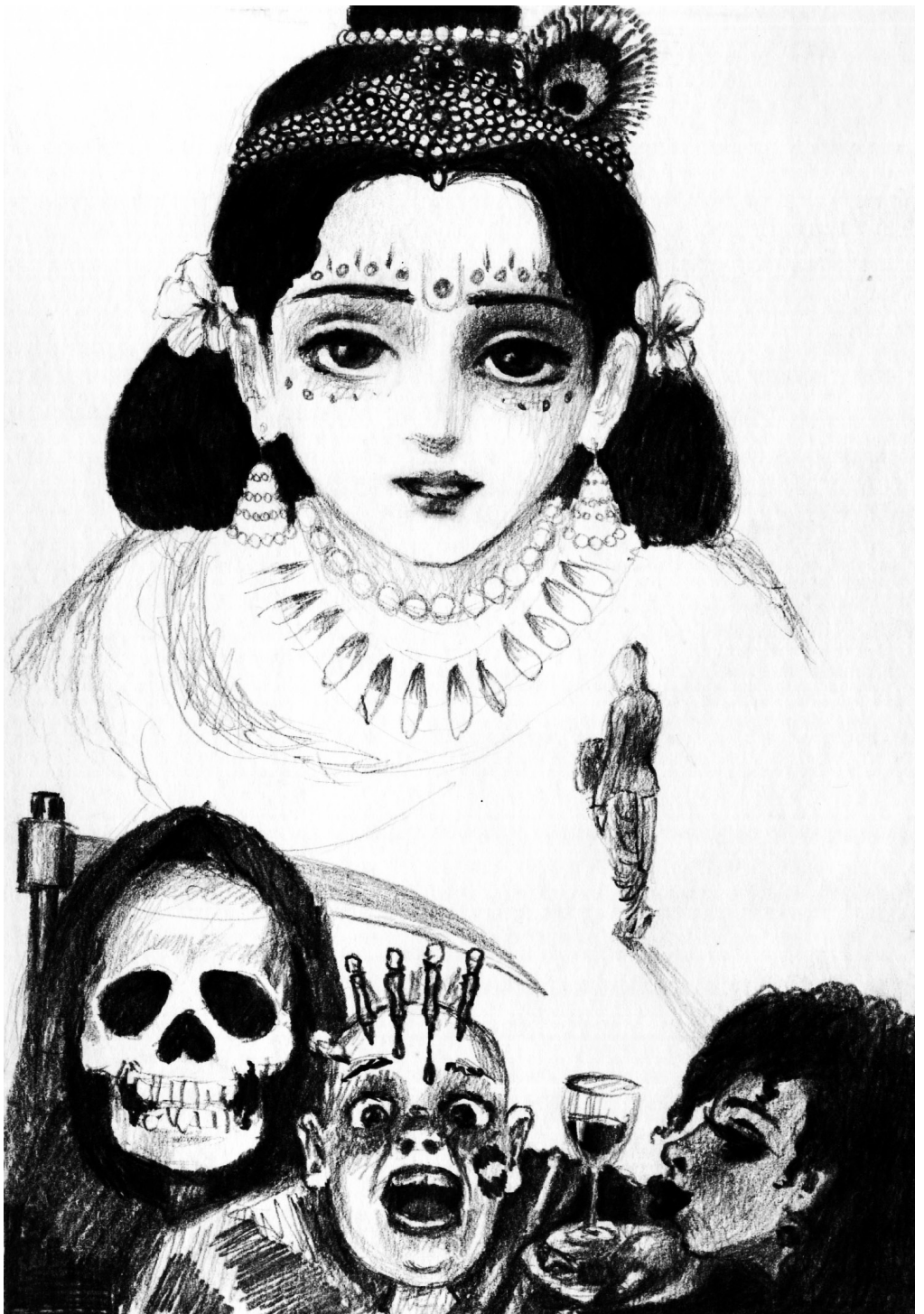
All of us have already evolved our consciousness in our past lives, and thus have already reached a certain level. Some of us have already reached high levels of consciousness. They are like pilgrims who have already walked many, many miles, crossing over hills, valleys, and towns. In this life when they see a hill, they are confident they can easily climb it. Nonetheless, if they continue, they will face increasingly steeper hills, which will require increased spiritual strength to climb.

Others of us have not walked a pilgrimage before and to do so now will require more focus, determination and sincerity. We can also make it to the top of the hill, but it will require greater efforts. If we want to reach the top of the hill, how we continue is not so important, what is important is that we keep on moving toward the top.

As a pilgrim needs to walk through many towns, we need to evolve our consciousness through several levels, to reach pure divine consciousness. When we reach a particular level of consciousness, we will develop certain qualities, which are like the stamps in our passport, which are essential for reaching our end goal. Each level our consciousness has reached will determine a specific way in which we will see others, the universe and ourselves.

If we are introspective, we will see at which level of consciousness we exist. In a world where achieving status, position, wealth, and self-adoration has become paramount how can we develop spiritually? How can we change our destinies and transform to achieve higher states of consciousness?





# A Dark Night for the Earth

## *Kali Yuga*

*“The Kali-yuga is described in the Bhagavatam as an ocean of faults. It is infected with so many anomalies that there seems to be no way out.”*

- A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada

One prominent environmental concern is global warming. According to a number of climate studies in the last two decades, 20th century’s were the hottest seasons in 400 years. Global warming has been connected to extreme weather patterns, which bring forth an increase of natural disasters.

At the same time, global warming also contributes to the challenge of global food security. The World Food program reported in 2013 that 842 million people in the world suffer from malnutrition. While the World Bank stated in 2013 that globally, food prices are near its historic peak. The World Watch Institute reported lack of access to clean water as another crisis, as 1.1 billion people have no access to clean drinking water.

Sociologists have started to voice their concern about the ‘moral breakdown’ in society. One horrific symptom of the moral breakdown is human trafficking, which is a form of slavery and a growing global problem.

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Research has established that at least 20.9 million people, mainly women and children, are bought and sold worldwide into commercial sexual servitude, forced labor and bonded labor each year.

It is also evident that increasing amounts of people are suffering from mental health problems. According to research done by the UN an estimated one in four people globally will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime. Almost one million people commit suicide every year, and it has become the third leading cause of death among young people. In particular, depression is ranked third in the global burden of disease, and is projected to rank first by 2030.

How can we understand this challenging time in which we live? Are there any explanations given in scriptures, which shed light on these phenomena?

According to the Vedic scriptures, all the problems we are experiencing are due to the arrival of a dark period called *Kali Yuga*. In Vedic cosmology time is cyclic and the universe goes through four major ages: *Satya Yuga* (Golden age), *Treta Yuga* (Silver age), *Dwapara Yuga* (Copper age), and *Kali Yuga* (Iron age).

Vedic scriptures explain that there is a perceptible deterioration in the quality of people's consciousness between each one of the *yugas*. Just as each precious metal becomes less pure and refined, the names of these *yugas* reflect the gradual degradation of civilization. When humanity's collective consciousness becomes more degraded, the result is that people increasingly destroy each other and the environment.

According to the Vedic calendar we are currently in the beginning of a *Kali Yuga* period which began between 3102 and 3113 B.C. The Vedic text, the Srimad-Bhagavatam predicts that humanity will degrade itself during *Kali Yuga*.



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All values such as truthfulness, cleanliness, tolerance, and mercy will continually diminish. Society will apply law and justice only based on money and power. Success in business will depend on deceit and hypocrisy. An individual's wealth will become the only indicator of their status, power and influence. The state will regard the poor as an unwanted burden.

Politicians and rulers will come to govern based on their ability to control, manipulate and overpower others. Governments will exploit the citizens and burden them with increasingly high taxes. Authorities will deny support to those who faithfully work throughout their entire lives the moment that they become invalid. In other incidences, treacherous workers will abandon good authorities.

'Intellectuals' who write in attractive and poetic words will be glorified and followed, even if their teachings lack morality, rationality or relevance to the real world. Even if they are addicted to destructive habits and their personal conduct is contradictory to their teachings – people will consider them as trustworthy.

At the same time, people will become weaker and life expectancy will decrease – eventually to barely 50 years. Men and women will search for partners only based on their physical attractiveness. One gender will judge the other's value only based on their sex appeal and wealth, overlooking their character, abilities, talent and integrity. It will become socially acceptable to appear in public with barely any clothing, while a person's beauty will be judged by their hairstyle.

Religious leaders will identify themselves as belonging to a certain faith by adhering to external dress, rituals and symbols, while being devoid of internal conviction and commitment. The majority of religious people will follow religious principles only to uphold an image. Ordinary persons will declare themselves as 'God'.

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These self-proclaimed ‘Gods’ will pose to be renounced, but then exploit their followers for wealth and unlimited relationships with women. Without studying or following religious scriptures, they will teach fabricated ideas as the absolute truth.

Family members will become resentful, abusive and violent towards each other over disagreement over insignificant amounts of wealth. Families will shun the elderly family members as useless. Despite working hard during the majority of the hours of the day, men will struggle to maintain their families. Cities will be controlled by criminals resulting in widespread pollution and violence. Women, children and other vulnerable persons will suffer increasing abuse.

The weather will haphazardly change with extreme heat, cold or rainfall resulting in severe ecological changes. Drought will lead to famine, malnutrition and crop failure. Industries will pollute rivers with toxic waste and excessively exploit natural resources. People will neglect the welfare of animals henceforth – wild species will become extinct and domesticated animals abused.

When we read the predictions for *Kali Yuga*, it might send a shiver down our spine. If we live in a safe part of the developed world in a wealthy region, we might feel that the predictions are greatly exaggerated. However, if we consider global conditions, we find that all of the predictions are coming true to some extent. Is there any hope for us in these challenging times, or is it our destiny to be doomed with social, economic, political, environmental, and psychological degradation?

## **A Golden Moon will dissipate the darkness**

As we live in a period in which we can be overwhelmed by endless social, environmental, political, and personal issues, many of us have experienced the dark night of the soul. On the other hand, we see that there is a hidden benediction in *Kali Yuga*; it produces both circumstances and predicaments that will push many souls into a phase of deep contemplation of the purpose behind our pain. Will we remain in this dark space contemplating our suffering or is there an alternative?

We see that amidst the growing personal, social, political, economic and environmental problems there are individuals and groups who have a deep hankering for authentic spirituality. There are many attempts to raise the consciousness on earth such as the spreading of ancient practices of *yoga*, meditation, vegetarianism, veganism, and spiritual environmentalism. There is a return to the understanding that the earth is sacred and all its aspects as forests, mountains and rivers are all conscious beings. Another profound shift in consciousness is the return to the worship of the Divine Feminine. The earth and all its inhabitants have been suffering due to misuse of masculine energy resulting in exploitation, devastation and war. The earth is crying for the Divine Feminine's energy and healing touch, which is nourishing, compassionate, merciful and empathetic.

What is behind this profound global shift in consciousness? Sacred texts have predicted that amidst the horrors of *Kali Yuga*, there will be an era of reawakening of consciousness, a golden age. How did this golden age descend upon the earth?

When the earth was anointed with the rays of a Golden moon, Gauracandra, the golden age within in *Kali Yuga* started. Gauracandra is the divine golden *avatar*, Caitanya Mahaprabhu, the Master of

Divine consciousness, who appeared in Mayapur, West Bengal in India on 18 February 1486. At the time of Caitanya's birth – the full moon was slowly rising and spreading its cooling rays over Nadia. It was also a night for a complete moon eclipse, during which all Hindu people in India go to sacred rivers and chant *mantras* aloud. Caitanya entered into the world while the atmosphere was vibrating with the sound of sacred *mantras*. Unusual celestial beings were seen several places – engaged in chanting *mantras* and calling out “*Jaya Sacinandana Gaura Hari!* – All glories to the Supreme Person who has come in a Golden form as the son of mother Saci!”

Ancient texts describe that Gauracandra is the *Yuga Avatar* – the particular *avatar* that appears in this age for establishing the spiritual practice most practical for this time. Vedic scriptures such as the *Atharva-Veda*, *Purusa-Bodini-Upanisad* predict his descent. The prediction is that in the beginning of *Kali Yuga*, the Supreme Personality of Godhead will descend in a golden form. His mission will be to spread the chanting the *Maha-mantra* to awaken divine love in the hearts of all people.

In another Vedic scripture, the *Vishnu-sahasra-nama-stotra*, in verse 92 and 75 it is stated that:

He will appear with golden complexion, with a beautiful body like molten gold, smeared with sandalwood pulp. The Supreme Lord Krishna's *avatar* will accept *sannyasa* (renounced order of life), he will be very equipoised and peaceful. He will be the highest abode of peace and devotion. He will silence the atheists. He will describe the confidential truth about the personality of Godhead.

What makes the presence of an *avatar* profound? Is there even a difference between an enlightened soul and an *avatar*? Vedic scriptures explain that the entire existence is composed of different ener-

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gies of the Supreme Person. The Divine has three principles energies: *Vishnu-tattva* (internal potency), *Jiva-tattva* (marginal potency, the individual spirit soul) and *Shakti-tattva* (external potency, the material creation). The Divine Person (*Vishnu-tattva*) can be seen as the artist, the *Jiva-tattva* are the children of the artist, and the *Shakti-tattva* are His artworks.

The Supreme Personality's direct expansions as his eternal divine consort Radharani and avatars as Buddha fall into the *Vishnu-tattva* category. Scriptures predict the appearance of each *avatar*; astrologically it can be clearly seen that they are divine in origin and they come to the material world with a specific mission. They are eternally fully aware of their relationship and specific service to the Supreme Person.

The Supreme Person's marginal energy is the source for all other individual souls that fall in the category of *Jiva-tattva*. These souls have a unique position as they can choose life in harmony with the desire of the Divine, or they can attempt to pursue their own desires in the material realm. All living beings in material world, ranging from the most powerful CEO to bacteria are all *jivas*, spirit souls, experiencing the shades of material existence.

As the Supreme Person facilitates our desires, He will allow a spirit soul to dwell in the material world until the spirit expresses a desire to return to spiritual realm. However, as the Supreme Person longs for loving exchanges with each soul, He descends in numerous avatars to remind the *jivas* about their spiritual original.

God has as the ability to reveal Himself to the *jivas* in unlimited ways. God is not confined to the limitations of the human mind, nor by the laws of nature, which govern the material realm. When He appears in the material realm, it is like the visit of the president to a prison. The president can enter as he wishes, speak to the prisoners,

move around and leave without being subjugated by the rules of the prison. *Avatars* similarly appear on earth according to their own desire and those who understand their position will see that they are transcendental. These Divine *avatars* are as Jesus explained, ‘in the world, but not of this world’.

The Supreme Person’s external energy is the *Shakti-tattva* from which the entire material creation originates. All *avatars* are superior to the *Shakti-tattva* and have eternal vision to differentiate between the material and spiritual energies.

If Caitanya is a real *avatar*, like Buddha, why is he unknown to most people? The scriptures also state that he is a ‘hidden *avatar*’ as he has come with a confidential mission. Caitanya Mahaprabhu comes with a unique mood. He does not declare himself God. He comes instead as a saint, devotee of the divine couple, Sri Sri Radha Krishna.

In the past 50 years, as eastern religion has spread to the west, numerous people have declared themselves as ‘God’ and then mislead, exploited, and abused their followers. For an extended period, we have seen how religious fanaticism has been misused to create division, antagonism, hatred and even violence and war amongst people. Several religious leaders have also shown themselves to be hypocrites, abusers, and criminals. Opportunistic persons misuse religion to accumulate wealth, fame, sexual relationships, followers, status and control. The consequence is a widespread disgust and rejection of religion.

Religion is similar to a knife; in the hands of a criminal it is a dangerous weapon causing death, while an expert surgeon will use a knife to operate and save lives. Many people who reject religion claim to prefer placing their faith in science. However, we have also witnessed that when people have degraded consciousness, they will also misuse science for violence, exploitation, and genocide.

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During World War 2, the Nazis did not consider themselves as religious; on the contrary, they were radically scientific. They used the best technology available to systematic kill Jewish people. We can conclude that unless we evolve our consciousness and engage it for a divine purpose, both science and religion can be destructive forces.

The Supreme Person, being fully aware of the widespread misuse of religion, came as Gauracandra with a unique mood. He does not declare that one should worship him. Instead He asks all people, regardless of class, gender or ethnicity, to join him in spiritual singing, and dancing. If we study the life and teachings of other *avatars* and spiritual leaders, they usually have higher requirements for their followers. They demand surrender or conversion to a specific religious path.

Gauracandra does not demand this. He simply asks us to become humble and develop a mood of servitude. His only requirement is that we give respect to all living beings honoring their divine origin. If we develop this consciousness, our hearts become open to receive the Divine Love of God. Gauracandra distinctly taught that the highest motivation to follow any religious path is to express love and render service. In his famous prayer, the *Sri Sri Siksastakam*, he declares:

O my dear Lord, I have no desire to accumulate wealth, nor do I desire beautiful women, nor do I want any number of followers. I only hanker to experience your Divine presence and receive and spread your Divine Love.

He emphasized the importance of respecting and serving all of humanity devoid of any discrimination.

In the next verse He continued:

One should chant the Holy name of the Lord in a humble state of mind, thinking oneself lower than the straw in the street. One should be more tolerant than a

tree and devoid of all false prestige and should be ready to offer all respects to others. In such a state of mind one can chant the Holy name of the Lord constantly.

These verses give us a glimpse into the mood of Gauracandra but what exactly did He desire to achieve? From scriptures such as *Caitanya-Caritamrita* (the nectarine pastimes of Caitanya), we learn that he was a great scholar of personalist philosophy who defeated the most prominent impersonalist scholars. He had followers from all castes, religious and economic backgrounds. At a young age, he decided to renounce normal life by taking *sannyasa* in order to dedicate himself fully to spreading spiritual teachings. Later in his life, he traveled the length and breadth of India, inspiring millions of people to join him in singing and dancing. We learn from scriptures that one major reason that Buddha appeared was to spread the principle of *Ahimsa* – non-violence and compassion towards all living beings. What are the unique teachings which Gauracandra Caitanya came to offer humanity?

## **Gauracandra and the *Bhakti* revival**

As our little finger is connected to our body we are conscious of all that the little finger experiences; if the finger is injured, we experience the pain. We are connected to the Supreme Person in the same way, so when any *jiva* is experiencing pain, the Supreme Person is sharing his pain. He is fully aware of the suffering and confusion we are experiencing in *Kali Yuga*. Out of concern and compassion, He decides to appear as Gauracandra to uplift us from this condition.

His goal is to spread a transcendental culture and pure love by a *Bhakti-yoga* revolution. *Bhakti* is a Sanskrit word expressing love and devotion, while *yoga* is the Sanskrit word for reconnecting.



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*Bhakti-yoga* is the path of reconnecting with the self, others and the Supreme Self through practices of love and devotion. Such practices include hearing about the Divine, glorifying Him, remembering His glories, serving His lotus feet, worshiping Him, offering respects to Him, serving Him, befriending Him and surrendering everything unto Him.

*Bhakti-yoga* takes the soul far beyond the experience of inner peace, liberation, *Nirvana* or merging with the *Brahman* effulgence. Once a soul is liberated and reaches one of these states, it simply means that there is no more suffering experienced. It is similar to being in a light room, where the temperature is perfectly controlled, there is a buzzing *OM* sound but you are in a straightjacket. Could that really be the ultimate purpose of our existence? To be devoid of any desire, activity, experience, relationship, and ultimately love?

Our current existence in the material realm is like an existence in captivity, in jail. Those who recognize that we are captives, and that we could be free, make plans to escape the prison. To aspire for liberation is to try to escape from the prison. Once people are out of jail they stop thinking about escaping and have an entire new existence. Similarly, when the soul is liberated, he has only moved into the doorway of self-realization. Beyond liberation lays an eternal realm of transcendental relationships.

Each one of us is a unique individual soul meant to experience, desire, serve, dance, and love in the eternal realm. There every step is a dance, every word is a song and there is a festival every day.

*Bhakti-yoga* stands in sharp contrast with impersonalist practices in which the goal is to annihilate each desire and even our self. Impersonalist philosophy argues that everything is illusion and therefore we should renounce it. If a person truly follows an impersonal path, he is required to give up all activities, relationships, dreams, and aspirations.

If we follow *Bhakti-yoga*, our goal is to reconnect each aspect of our lives with the Divine thereby spiritualizing our existence. *Bhakti* philosophy argues that the material world is a manifestation of the Divine's energy. The illusion is to think that we, in the material world and other living beings exist separately from the Divine. *Bhakti-yoga* practices open our eyes to see the spiritual interconnectedness and the divine purpose of the entire creation. In *Bhakti*, we are encouraged to redirect every shade of human emotions towards God through song, dance and worship.

Vedic scriptures predicted the *Bhakti* revival of Caitanya in India, and predicted that the *Bhakti* movement would later spread over the entire world. Since the 1960s, when the foremost *Bhakti-yoga* teacher, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivendanta Swami Prabhupada, started to spread the *Bhakti* teachings internationally, millions of people have embraced the teachings of *Bhakti*. In the birthplace of Caitanya, Sri Mayapur Dhama, there is a rapidly growing spiritual city as people from all over the world are moving there to practice *Bhakti-yoga*.

Scriptures explain that the *Bhakti* movement of Caitanya is unique and offers such unrivalled spiritual experiences, that several beings from higher realms are looking for opportunities to take birth on earth simply to join the *Bhakti* revival. Scriptures reveal that during Caitanya's life demigods as Shiva and Lakshmi Devi appeared as his associates to experience the spreading of ecstatic dancing, singing and feasting.

Caitanya's mission is to be revolutionary of religion – He rejected all rituals devoid of love, which do not serve to elevate the consciousness. Desiring to unite all people, He identified the essence of all religion, emphasized universal spiritual principles and removed the barriers between religions. What was the most essential practice, which he taught to achieve this?

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That people should come together and celebrate their spiritual existence through *sankirtan* – the congregational singing of names of the Divine. As rain falls without discrimination on the ocean and to barren land, Caitanya spreads pure love without discrimination to the religious and to the secular people.

### ***Kirtan Culture***

*“Entering the kirtan is like going aboard a boat that quickly brings us to the sacred space of the heart and into the presence of God” - Sacinandana Swami*

*Kirtan* is the singing of God’s name; it is a means to express our *bhava* (love) in our hearts through music. When a group of people join together to chant *kirtan* it becomes *sankirtan*. The sole purpose of *kirtan* is to express our devotion to God – through each syllable we sing every movement of our arms, every movement of our legs, every movement of our heads, and every part of our body

Musical instruments and rhythmical drumming accompany the singing and everyone is encouraged to participate by singing, clapping or dancing. Yet *kirtan* is far more than music. *Kirtan* is an offering, a gift of love, to God.

*Kirtan* is a unique form of music – in which the essential element is our sincerity in expressing feelings from our heart.

Why did Caitanya specifically teach *sankirtan* as the most important spiritual practice for *Kali Yuga*? Imagine a man of the 21st century, who wishes to propose to a girl. He chooses to write the proposal and place it in a bottle. Then having great faith in destiny he crosses his fingers, and throws the bottle into the ocean, hoping that she will find it someday.

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If the bottle ever reaches the girl, by that time the girl will probably be married to someone else, have children or even grand children. If the man is serious about communicating his feelings to the girl, he needs to consider what the most effective ways of communication are for the present age.

While his goal remains the same, how he will achieve his goal will be dependent on the era in which he lives. If the man fails to find out which form of communication he should use such as telephone, e-mail or Skype, he will miss his opportunity to connect with the girl.

Just as the appropriate technology makes communication over long distance easier and quicker, Caitanya teaches *sankirtan* as it is the most effective method of self-realization. We can perform *sankirtan* at any time, at any place by anyone – and will be able to connect to and find complete fulfillment in the Divine energy.

What makes *kirtan* profound? When we use normal words, the sound and the object it refers to are related, but not identical. If we are thirsty and we repeat the word water, the word will not quench our thirst. Sacred sound vibration is different – the names of the Divine and the Divine are identical.

*Kirtan* gives us opportunity to become aware of the presence of God in our hearts. It establishes a sacred space where we can express our feelings and have a personal exchange with God. All the pain, suffering, loneliness and confusion we experience are due to our lack of awareness of the presence and love of God.

He is already present in our hearts and waiting for us to express our deepest feelings to him. God hankers to have this exchange of love with each one of us. Anyhow, what can we offer to God? What does he need? He does not need anything. The question is: “What does He want from us?”

## *A Dark Night for the Earth*

He wants us to become eternally blissful in His loving service. He has given us the way to reconnect with this spiritual destiny. All that God deeply desires of us is that we come together with great enthusiasm, with great devotion, with great emotion, and with great gratitude to chant, dance, be united in love of one another, and love for God through *sankirtan*.

If we engage in *sankirtan*, Caitanya will reciprocate with us regardless of the desires we have. Even if we make just one small effort to connect with Caitanya through *sankirtan*, he will establish an eternal connection with us. He can give material blessings, empower us to bring forth world peace, endow us with qualities such as compassion, or grant us *prema bhakti*, transcendental love. We simply have to realize the magnitude of His desire to transform the world through spreading sacred sound.

Sound is the most powerful medium through which spiritual energy can be spread, as once a sound vibration is created it will exist for eternity while being able to spread through all layers of existence. Sacred sound affects the consciousness of each living entity it encounters as it awakens its spiritual nature. *Sankirtan* therefore is the most powerful weapon to bring forth a spiritual revolution of consciousness.

When we perform *sankirtan*, spiritual energy surcharges the entire atmosphere. If we strongly desire to oppose exploitation, antagonism, hatred, and violence amongst people – we can bring forth the most powerful shift in consciousness by *sankirtan*. Every thought, word and action of hatred pollutes the atmosphere with more destructive energy. It lowers the vibration of the environment and darkens people's consciousness.

When we join to call out the names of God, the effect becomes more powerful. We experience each other's offerings and expression

## *Awaken Your Spiritual Destiny*

of love for God. Singing together, we create an incredible energy barrier around us, we establish a holy meeting place where we exchange spiritual strength, inspiration and support. When we immerse our consciousness in *kirtan*, we will become aware of the sacred connection we share with all humans, creatures and creation.

*Kirtan* brings the Divine's qualities of compassion, truthfulness, tolerance, kindness, forgiveness and harmony into the atmosphere. The Divine presence in the atmosphere eradicates all negative energy and elevates the collective consciousness of people.

*Kirtan* creates a powerful force, which breaks through all barriers and unites people by creating one focal point – the worship of the Divine.



## *A Dark Night for the Earth*

The power of the chanting of the *Maha-mantra* is expressed by Caitanya Mahaprabhu:

Oh My Lord your Holy Name alone can render all benedictions to living beings and thus you have hundreds and millions of names, like Krishna and Govinda. In these transcendental names, you have invested all your transcendental energies. There are not even hard and fast rules for chanting these Holy Names. Oh, my Lord out of your kindness you enable us to easily approach you by your Holy Names.

## ***Japa* Meditation: A doorway to a divine encounter**

*“Japa Meditation is a method to enter into the sacred space of the heart, wherein the entirety of the spiritual world awaits you”*

- Sacinandana Swami

The essence of *Bhakti-yoga* is to develop and deepen a relationship with the Divine. One practice, which helps us to focus on our personal connection with the Divine, is *japa*, individual *mantra* meditation.

During *japa* meditation one repeats the *Maha-mantra* ‘Hare Krishna – Hare Krsna – Krsna Krsna – Hare Hare – Hare Rama – Hare Rama – Rama Rama – Hare Hare’, softly but clearly enough that each *mantra* can be heard.



## *Awaken Your Spiritual Destiny*

What is the meaning of the *Maha-mantra*? One explanation given in *shastra* (scriptures) is that the *Maha-mantra* is a prayer, calling upon the Divine feminine Radha, addressed as Hare and the Supreme attractor, Krishna and source of all bliss, Rama.

The essence of the prayer is to reconnect to the Divine couple, Radha Krishna, in loving service. “Oh my beloved Radha, Oh my beloved Krishna, please allow me to reconnect with you through divine service.” As spiritual practitioners chant the *Maha-mantra*, more and more profound meanings are revealed to them. Those who have chanted for years share realizations as “the *mantra* opens internally.”

One practices *japa* meditation by using *japa mala*, (chanting beads) which is ideally made of Tulasi wood. There are 108 beads representing the 108 closest spiritual associates of Radha Krishna. The 109th bead is bigger, called the Sumeru bead and represents Radha Krishna.

One starts chanting on the largest bead next to the Sumeru bead, and then repeats the *Maha-mantra* on each of the 108 beads until one has returned to the Sumeru bead, then one turns the beads around and chants from the smallest to the largest bead.

During *japa* meditation, we dedicate our time to establish a conscious connection with Sri Sri Radha Krishna. In this world, many things divert us from our relationship with the Divine – other relationships, our job, society, our dreams, etc.

However, we have no way to hold onto any of these eternally. Time will take away every single thing, position, accomplishment, and person we have in our lives.

All our possessions and positions are like smoke; one day they will simply disappear into the air. We never know when what we treasure the most – will simply vanish. We are only assured that one relationship will always remain with us, and that is our relationship with God.



## *A Dark Night for the Earth*

We may even know this now, but our worldly relationships, and responsibilities continue to demand our time and attention, and we often allow them to take up almost all of our energy.

When we do *japa* meditation, it is a time we can fully give ourselves to deepen our relationship with the Divine. To do so we need to prepare our consciousness before we chant *japa*, so that this time becomes a sacred solitary meeting with the Divine. Ideally, we should schedule a time for *japa* early in the morning when we can chant in a peaceful quite environment. To help facilitate this sacred meeting, we can follow the sacred meditation space.

### **Sacred space meditation**

- Sit down comfortably, closing your eyes and allow all your worldly responsibilities, concerns and desires to slowly disappear.
- See each of your relationships as a rope that you are holding onto, and then slowly release the ropes one by one.
- See how your relationships with your family, friends, acquaintances and employees are all sliding.
- Now you find yourself alone. Your environment is quiet and your mind is peaceful.
- Your awareness has moved internally so that you have forgotten everything about your life, including who you think you are.
- Now allow yourself to move into your own inner sacred space. It is the ideal environment for you to connect with the Divine. It may be in a forest, a quite place next to the ocean or a holy place.
- In that place, find a sanctuary, a temple or shrine – where you can feel safe and spiritually connected.
- Become aware that in your truest being you are really an

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eternal spiritual soul, an eternal servant of the Divine. It is only due to some misfortune that you have been absent from that relationship and instead have been wandering in the material universe failing to find permanent meaning, fulfillment or love.

- However, your destiny has now turned. You have finally desired to return to your spiritual source, and hanker to see your real identity as a pure spirit soul, a resident of the realm of love, completely separate from the gross and subtle body.

- Now in your sacred space, feel that the only presence is that of the Divine – only Radha Krishna. No one else. You now have the opportunity to connect with Them – through your *japa* meditation.

- You can fully open your heart to this relationship and feel pure love and devotion rise in your heart.

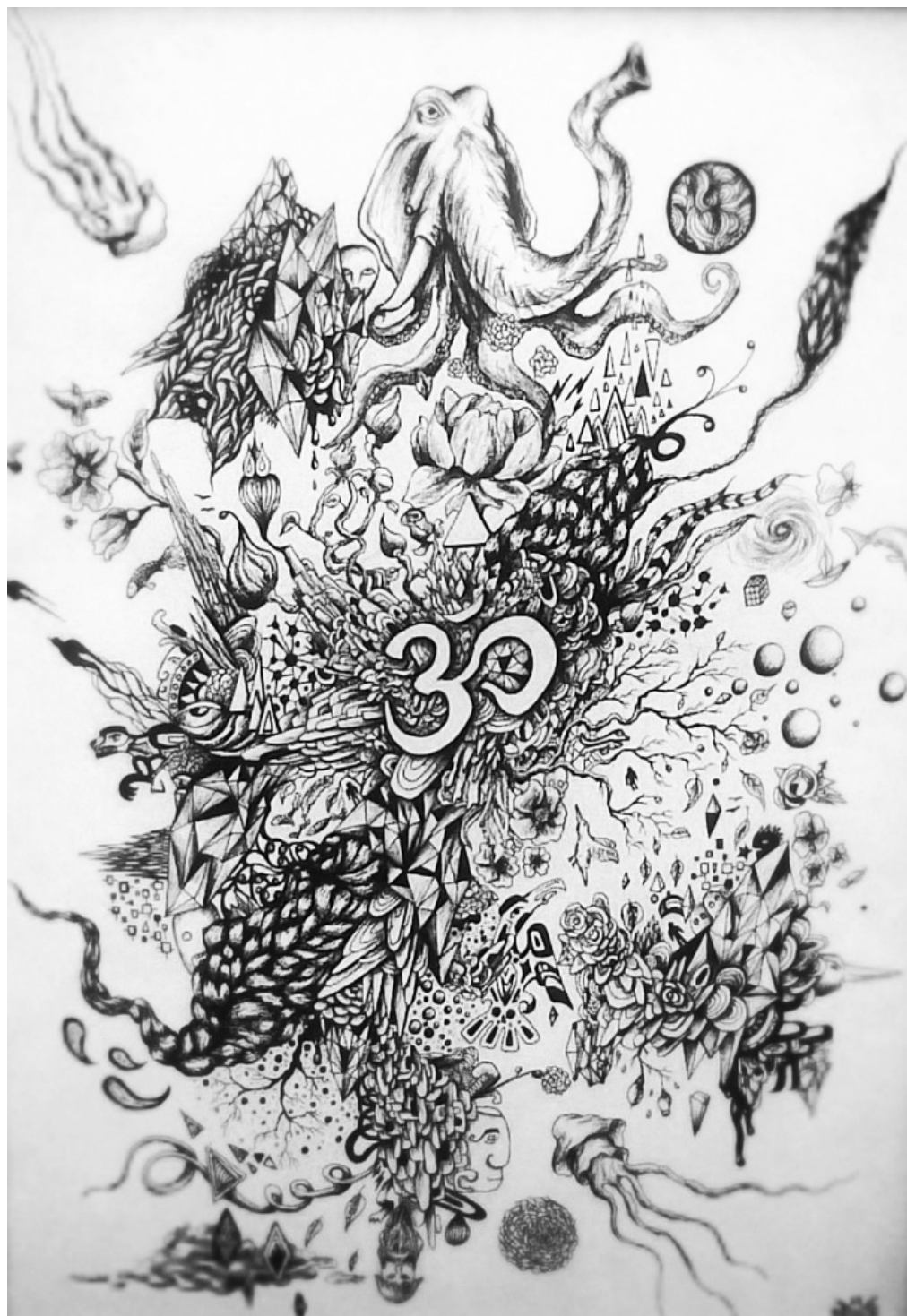
- Start chanting on your *japa* beads – using each *mantra* as an opportunity to express your feelings.

- When you have chanted for the duration, which you intended to, you can end your meeting with the Divine Couple by expressing your gratitude for the opportunity to be in their presence.

- You are ready to move your awareness to your external life in this world. Gradually, as required recall the responsibilities and social roles that are waiting for you.

- Now see how with each responsibility and role you will act to your greatest capacity, but remembering your eternal spiritual identity.





# Is Anyone Too Materialistic for Spirituality?

*“My dear Lord, I am Your eternal servant, but somehow or other I have fallen into the ocean of this material world. Kindly pick me up and fix me as a speck of dust at Your lotus feet.”*

-Lord Caitanya, Siksastakam prayers

Although we may be attracted to the idea of spirituality, we may also feel that our current habits are preventing us from pursuing spirituality. We may find ourselves hopelessly addicted to enjoyment of a particular flavor, as taking drugs. Alternatively, we may come from a community where people consider the idea of believing in God as primitive and irrational. We might be involved in an industry, which is by nature immoral or spiritual practices might seem too foreign to follow.

Even if the life we are living is in complete contradiction with spirituality, if we start chanting the *Maha-mantra*, our life will change. In the *Bhakti* tradition, we find several accounts of persons who started chanting and whose lives then drastically transformed. Knowing about these incidences can give us hope that we can also transform.

## **The Muslim Saint Haridas Thakur**

During the 1450s, there lived a man, Haridas Thakur who was born in a Muslim family. Despite his religious upbringing, he was attracted to singing names of God from a very young age. By the time he was a teenager he met a *Bhakti-yogi* saint who taught him to chant the *Maha-mantra*. When he started chanting this *mantra* daily his family and community rejected him. Haridas no longer had anywhere to live and thus decided to move to another district.

He walked to the forest of Benapola where he constructed a cottage and planted a *Tulasi* plant (a holy basil plant). He lived a very simple life, and dedicated the majority of his time to chanting the *Maha-mantra* in front of *Tulasi*. Due to his chanting, he developed extraordinary character, wisdom, mystic powers and purity – which made him popular under the local people.

A resentful Muslim man known as Ramacandra Khan governed the district in which Haridas Thakur lived. As more people began to know and adore Haridas, the stories reached Ramacandra Khan. He was disturbed to hear about Haridas's fame and felt threatened by his potential influence. Ramacandra Khan's envy of Haridas grew along with his desire to destroy Haridas's reputation. Ramacandra Khan sent his men to spy on Haridas – to determine what his weakness could be. To Ramacandra Khan's greatest frustration, he could not find any fault in the character of Haridas Thakur.

Ramacandra Khan was still determined to destroy the reputation of Haridas and thought deeply how he could achieve this. Then he got a bright idea! He knew that Haridas had been following the life of a monk and never had any contact with women. The ideal way to ruin him would be to get him involved with a low class woman.

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Ramacandra Khan commanded his servants to find his city's best prostitutes and bring them to his court. Upon seeing the young beautiful women, he said, "There is a so-called saint, named Haridas Thakur in the forest. I need a woman to go seduce him so that he breaks his religious vows. Just name your price and I will pay it."

However, the prostitutes had respect for monks, felt disgusted at the idea and rejected his proposal. Ramacandra Khan pleaded with them and promised to offer whatever amount of money they desired. One of the prostitutes became attracted to the challenge, and confidently promised: "I shall attract the mind of Haridas Thakur within three days."

Thinking about the joy of defaming a monk, Ramacandra Khan excitedly replied, "Excellent! I shall send my constable with you and when he sees you with Haridas he will immediately arrest him and bring both of you to me." The prostitute being a strong, independent woman replied: "No, I will seduce Haridas Thakur, on my terms only. First, let me have union with him once, then the second time I shall take your constable with me to arrest him."

With fixed determination to allure Haridas Thakur, the young prostitute dressed in sensual silk clothes, draped her long hair, and sprayed her body with perfumes. As evening approached, she walked to the cottage of Haridas Thakur, with her ankle and waist bells making alluring sounds. Moving in a most elegant way she made sure that Haridas Thakur became aware of her presence and then bowed down before his Tulasi plant. She then slowly moved closer towards Haridas Thakur, bowing down to touch his feet. As she stood up, she slowly started to move her clothes exposing parts of her body to Haridas.

She spoke to him in very sweet words, "My dear Thakur, O great preacher, great devotee, you are so beautifully built and your youth

is just beginning. What woman could control her mind after seeing you? I am so eager to be united with you. My mind is greedy for this. If I don't obtain you I shall die."

Haridas Thakur replied, "Who could reject your proposal? I am obliged to accept you without fail, but you will have to wait until I finish chanting Hare Krishna on my beads. Until I do, please sit down here and listen to the chanting of the Holy Name. As soon as I am finished, I shall fulfill your every desire."

Hearing this the prostitute was convinced that she would succeed in seducing Haridas. For the rest of night Haridas Thakur chanted on his beads until the light of morning appeared. When she saw it was morning, she stood up and left. She was still determined and thus went to Ramacandra Khan and said, "Last night Haridas Thakur has promised to enjoy with me. Tonight I shall return and he certainly shall have union with me."

That evening the prostitute returned to Haridas Thakur's cottage and he gave her full assurance saying, "Last night you were disappointed. Please excuse my failure to satisfy you. I shall certainly accept you. Please sit down here and wait for me while I complete my vowed number of rounds of chanting of the *Maha-mantra*. Then your desire will surely be fulfilled."

Hearing the assurance from Haridas Thakur the prostitute felt convinced that it was just a matter of time, before she would finally seduce him. Thus, she sat down in the doorway of Haridas Thakur's hut. In an attempt to allure Haridas Thakur's mind, she imitated his chanting at times singing: "Hari, Hari."

When the night ended, the prostitute was restless. When Haridas Thakur noticed this he said, "I have made a vow to chant ten million names of Krishna this month. I have taken this vow, but now the vow is nearing its end. I thought today I would be able to finish. I tried my



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best to chant Hare Krishna all night, but still I have not finished. Tomorrow I will surely finish and my vow will be fulfilled. Then it will be possible for me to enjoy with you in full freedom.”

The prostitute then returned to Ramacandra Khan and informed him of what had happened. The next night she went at the beginning of the evening to be with Haridas Thakur. After offering obeisances to the Tulasi plant and Haridas Thakur, she sat on the doorstep. As she heard Haridas Thakur’s chanting, she also personally chanted “Hari, Hari.”

“I am convinced that I will finish my vow, of chanting ten million names of Krishna this month”, Haridas Thakur informed her, “Then I will satisfy all your desires.”

The morning came and Haridas Thakur was still chanting. Unlike the other mornings the prostitute had still not left, instead she remained seated. She was overwhelmed with shame for her attempt to seduce a monk. It felt as if she had stabbed herself in the heart. She became disgusted with her previous thoughts and desires. Turning to look deep into her heart, she wondered what had brought about this powerful transformation.

Then it dawned on her that the monk she had planned to seduce had become her savior. She realized that hearing Haridas Thakur’s constant chanting of the *Maha-mantra* had transformed her.

With genuine remorse, she fell at Haridas Thakur’s feet and confessed that Ramacandra Khan had sent her to seduce him. “Because I have taken the profession of a prostitute”, she said, “I have performed unlimited impure acts. Haridas, please forgive me, and save me by teaching me spiritual truth.”

Haridas Thakur replied, “I knew everything about the conspiracy of Ramacandra Khan. He is weak minded, insecure and envious.

“When I understood he was planning this intrigue against me, I immediately planned to leave this place. Then when you came, I changed my mind to stay. I could see that you had been carried away with promiscuity, but you were innocent. In the core of your heart there was a desire for pure love, it was just covered by so many other confusing desires that you have forgotten about it.

“Sometimes you could hear a faint sound whispering ‘I need real love’. Then you did not know how to find it, and ended up looking for love in the form of admiration from men. Still, I had complete faith that if you heard the chanting of the *Maha-mantra* your desire for pure love would grow. Now I see that you have reconnected with your true self as you have experienced the Divine energy of the *Maha-mantra*.”

The prostitute overwhelmed with emotions of gratitude replied, “Haridas, I cannot comprehend the depth of your compassion. No one ever saw me in this way; religious people looked upon me in disgust, while other men simply saw me as an object, which could fulfill their desires. I can see now that you are my only true friend, so I beg you to act as my spiritual master. I need to discard my old life. Please give me guidance how I can do this and embark on the path of self-realization.”

Haridas Thakur replied, “We should cultivate a vision of compassion, realizing that most individuals are lost souls, hankering for love, while acting in ways which only take them further from it. You have now broken free from the bounds of illusion and realized that you can find complete fulfillment in the *Maha-mantra*.

It is time for you to follow the life of a *sadhaka* (a spiritual practitioner). So immediately, go home and distribute all your property to the *brahmanas* (religious teachers). Then come back to this cottage and stay here, chant the *Maha-mantra* continuously and serve the

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the *Tulasi* plant by watering her and offering prayers to her. If you dedicate yourself to these spiritual practices and a pure lifestyle, you will become fully self-realized.”

After giving the prostitute these instructions, Haridas Thakur stood up and left to find another secluded place where he could continue with his meditation. Haridas Thakur was an elevated saint and thus the desire to touch the prostitute did not even enter his heart or mind. While knowing what her intended mission was, he only felt sympathy seeing her as a lost and exploited young girl. Instead of judging and condemning her, he desired to uplift her.

Soon thereafter, the prostitute distributed all her possessions and fully embraced the life of an ascetic. She shaved her head clean and stayed within that cottage in the forest wearing only white cloth. Following in the footsteps of Haridas Thakur, she began chanting the *Maha-mantra* throughout the whole day and night.

She worshipped the *Tulasi* plant and ate only whatever food people would bring her. On days in which no food came, she would accept it as being ordained by destiny and would fast. In this way, the prostitute became a famous *Bhakti yogi* saint. As years passed, she grew in spiritual realization and many great spiritualists would visit her to hear her speak. Her profound transformation astounded all the people who met her. They could not believe that the *Bhakti yogi* saint had once been a prostitute.

## **The Professional Assassin**

David was a man from Europe who was a part of an underground gang as a professional assassin. He received professional training to kill enemies since he was a very young age. One day as he was walking in the streets of Rome, a young monk, selling *Bhakti* literature, approached him. David was disinterested, but somehow the monk convinced him to buy a book.

Once David had the book in his hands, something about the book had grasped his attention and he felt compelled to read it. As David read, it felt as if the author of the book, Srila Prabhupada, was addressing him directly. Prabhupada explained the fragility of human existence, how any of us could die at any moment while most of us had no idea what would happen after death. Having witnessed the death of countless people, David had seen the intense fear, confusion and horror, which most people experience at the time of death.

As David was part of a gang, he was fully aware of the sword of death, which hung on a very thin thread above his own head. David's training had created seemingly unbreakable walls in his mind, which never made him fear or even question the significance of death. Death was part of his everyday life. Killing people had become a duty, which he never questioned; it was simply necessary to keep himself alive.

Now death had started to have a new face. David read that our actions create our future *karma*, which determines our destination after death. However, for the spiritual practitioners, death could be a door to transcendence. Miraculously the words shot like a steel arrow through the barriers around his heart. For the first time in his adult life, he felt an emotion stirring in his heart. Was the only goal

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of his existence to be a killing machine, while knowing that their opponents were planning to eliminate him? Could it be that the law of *karma* really existed? What type of dreadful *karma* had he been accumulating?

As these unfamiliar feelings moved through him it felt like his heart had caught fire. He had to find a solution to his predicament. David frantically continued searching for the answer. He found the answer: “Persons who chant the *Maha-mantra* will become delivered from all their past *karma*; and if they can repeat or remember the *Maha-mantra* at the moment of death, they are guaranteed to be liberated.”

The walls in his mind were closing in again, there was no need to be fearful, life ends at death, the mission of his life is to kill enemies. That was the end of our insignificant existence. David put the book down and resolved not to read it again.

Yet a voice in his heart had been awoken, which now could not be silenced. As days passed he tried to forget the book, forget the words of Srila Prabhupada, the *Maha-mantra* – but it incessantly echoed inside him. A month later, he received a new assignment. As normal a superior handed him an envelope containing photos of whom he had to assassinate – no questions. As he opened the envelope, he found photos of two very young children. He was trained to perform his duty; authorities were never to be challenged, as he perfectly understood any resistance from his side guaranteed his own torture and death. Now the voice, which had been a faint whisper, became overwhelming.

Unable to bear the shouting resistance in his mind, he went back to the street where he had met the monk. He scrutinizingly searched the street, but there was no trace of the monk. Finally, in feeling of despair, like a storm was tearing his mind apart, he sat down on the sidewalk.

A young woman, Lila, who was passing noticed David, a soldier, a man looking utterly lost and helpless. She wanted to ignore him, as he looked potentially dangerous, yet a deep sadness surrounded him. She quietly walked over, then keeping a safe distance spoke to him hesitantly, “Mmmmm excuse me, you look, slightly down. I am on my way to a *kirtan* yoga session at our *yoga* center. There is an open invitation to everyone in this area.” Pulling all her courage together, she asked with a nervous smile, “Would you like to come?”

David had been so lost in the maze of his thoughts that he did not notice Lila, nor did he hear most of what she had said. As he looked up, he immediately knew that there was a similarity between her and the monk. That notion pushed him to break through his normal coded behavior and he asked her, “Come where? To attend what?”

Slightly shocked by his harsh expression and the roughness of his voice, Lila feebly replied, “To a *kirtan* yoga session.” While feeling very tense she quickly added, “It’s not *asana* yoga; it is a type of meditation in which you sing the *Maha-mantra*.” She almost fainted when David suddenly jumped up and shouted, “The *Maha-mantra*!”

Being overwhelmed himself with his spontaneous reaction he backed off one-step. Composing herself while not knowing if she should become more fearful or relieved, she replied, “Well, yes we sing the Hare Krishna *Maha-mantra*.” Trying his best to conceal his great relief, he replied, “It might be an interesting experience. How do I get there?”

The situation made Lila feel slightly overwhelmed, but she still replied, “You could just walk with me, the center is close by and the program will start soon.” Automatically he started calculating all the risks, but the yearning voice was shouting and demanding that he should go. He found himself almost unwillingly nodding and walking

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with Lila to the *yoga* studio. His eyes were trained to survey the area for danger, but as they walked, everything seemed safe.

He entered the *yoga* studio and followed Lila into a small hall to join a group of people seated in a half moon. It was as if she had led him into another dimension, and for a few moments, he had left his entire dark world behind.

The smell of incense filled the room, and candles created a soft atmosphere, while most people sat quietly, eyes closed, waiting for the bhajan to begin. Lila pointed to a huge sign with a *mantra* painted on it and said, "That is the *Maha-mantra* we will be singing."

Then suddenly there was a shift to excitement in the atmosphere as a Swami in saffron robes smiling radiantly, entered into the room. He sat down, welcomed everyone, and made an unusual request, "For the next hour, please take your mind away from everything else, and focus only on hearing and singing the *Maha-mantra*."

"Try to sincerely cry out to Krishna, like a baby cries for his mother. There is nothing else which can appease a baby when it wants his mother, only the mother will, so cry and chant in that way like you only want Krishna."

David could not recall the last time he had cried, he was not even sure if he possessed enough emotion to have tears. What he did know was that he was desperate for change, for a solution. So as the *kirtan* began, he closed his eyes and listened attentively to everyone singing.

As the *kirtan's* intensity grew, he felt a yearning to join in the singing, to express his painful loneliness, to as the swami said cry like a lost baby to his mother. As he softly started singing a wave of relief washed over him. For the first time in his life, he felt that he was more than his body and brain, he felt like there was a part of himself awakening, a part that was eternal and free.

Overwhelmed by this realization he started singing with more feeling, calling out to someone, the mysterious Divine energy or being behind the *mantra*. As the *kirtan* ended, he felt one small tear forming in his eye and he quickly swept it away with his hand. Sitting with his eyes closed, he wanted to hold onto this profound experience – which had transported him – to a seemingly transcendental realm. David's meditation was broken when he heard Lila asking him, "Would you like to meet Premananda Swami?"

At first, he did not know how to respond, but then as his predicament resurfaced in his mind, he knew he had to speak to the Swami and ask advice, regardless of how impossible his situation seemed. He nodded and walked over to the Swami who seemed to possess the innocence and purity of a child.

When Premananda Swami saw David, he said, "When we chant, we should chant, knowing that the Lord is in our heart and is listening. He shares all of our feelings, understands our greatest fears and waits for us to turn and ask for his help." He then paused, looked deeply into David's eyes and David felt convinced that the Swami already knew everything about him. Feeling defeated and anxious David blurted out, "Do you take confessions like Catholics do?" Lila looked slightly shocked, but Premananda Swami very gently smiled and said, "Of course we do. You and I can go to a private place and discuss what is burdening your mind."

David's heart started beating profusely and tension was gripping his entire body. Premananda Swami gracefully walked away and motioned him to follow him out of the hall into a small studio. They sat down and David searched his mind for an explanation of his situation. He then said, "I am something of a soldier."

Premananda Swami simply nodded and said, "That's good, Arjuna from the Bhagavad-Gita was a soldier too." David paused, his hands



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were trembling, and he knew he had to cut right into the truth so he blurted out, “I am a professional assassin – I kill people for a living.” Then his voice choked up in fear and he sat stunned unable to look into Premananda Swami’s eyes.

Premananda Swami reached over to David’s clenched hands, placing his hand gently on top and said, “But I believe you came here because you want to change?” Now the full reality of his desire to escape from his life dawned on David, he did not know how to explain what he had read about *karma*, how he was doomed to suffer endlessly or how desperate he was here to hear there was an alternative.

He simply said, “If I will stop, they will kill me.” Premananda Swami sat quietly closing his eyes. David hung his head, feeling hopeless.

Premananda Swami then spoke, “Krishna can change your destiny. If you sincerely pray to him, and chant, he can open a doorway for you to another life. However, Krishna will want to see that you really desire to change, and that you have faith that He can make it possible.” The words came as a lifeline to David. He wanted to believe there was a way to change his destiny, yet so much doubt remained in his mind.

Premananda Swami bought a string of meditation beads out of a small bag, which hung around his neck and said, “This is *japa mala*; I will show you how to chant the *Maha-mantra* on these beads. If you do this meditation practice daily, your vision will become transcendental, so that you can see Krishna’s plan for your life.”

David quietly sat and listened as Premananda Swami revealed to him how to approach the sacred practice of chanting. Premananda Swami then gave him a set of *japa mala*, and assured him, “David, if you really desire to change, if you sincerely want to pursue a pure life, Krishna will help you.”

## *Awaken Your Spiritual Destiny*

David had two weeks within which he had to complete his pending assassination mission. He decided to take the risk of postponing it as long as possible. In the mean time he dedicated as much time as possible to chant on his *japa mala*, to read Bhagavad-Gita, and to visit the *yoga* center for *kirtan* programs. As each day passed, he could feel his entire being transforming and his conviction grew that he had a spiritual destiny to pursue. At the same time, he became increasingly aware of the heavy chains of consequence, which bound him. As the end of the second week came closer, the anxiety haunted him without cessation. One night he got a call to join his colleagues to celebrate a “victory” over an enemy in their underground club.

Realizing there was no valid explanation for his absence he went with his heart weighed down. The club was as usual smoky with a band playing, and full of scantily dressed women offering everything men desired – but nothing seemed appealing anymore. Instead, everything reminded him of the sword of death, which he had hung over his own head. He found a corner in which he could blend into the background. As the night passed, his colleagues became more consumed with the alcohol, drugs and women, while he sat silently and prayed in utter desperation.

The booming sound of gunshots abruptly brought him back. He scanned and summarized the scene in seconds – the opposing gang had arrived heavily armed and was systematically eliminating all the people. They had blocked the only entrance and they were blowing the entire club to pieces. David realized he had no way to escape – the sword of death was now upon him.

He was drowning in an ocean of screams and gunshots, but it seemed that he was in a surreal situation. While the uniformed men were destroying everything and everyone around him, it seemed that he had become invisible. He stood motionless while the men with the

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guns looked right through him and continued blasting away, until nothing remained but dead bodies and darkness. The shooting ceased; the men circled the room speaking in a foreign language and then left.

David was captured by utter disbelief; was this a dream, was he dead, or did Krishna just save him from his destiny? He realized that the doorway to escape from his doomed life now stood open – but he had limited time to run through it before it would shut. He knew how to get a new ID and passport so he could leave the country – but where would he go? Regardless of where he wanted to go, he knew he had to greet Premananda Swami. Still feeling uncertain about the reality of the situation he quietly moved out of the club, his senses being aware of each little movement and sound. Feeling like he was running across on a bridge, which was disintegrating, under his feet, he raced to the *yoga* studio.

It was late night, the lights were all switched off and the doors closed. He banged loudly on the front door, but there was no response. In desperation, he looked down the street to see if anyone was watching, then jumped over the wall, and forced open a back door. Inside, he started looking for anyone who might still be awake.

The noise he made woke Lila, who cautiously came downstairs and found David. Lila was confused and shocked and asked, “Are you all right, David, do you know what time it is? Why did you come here?”

David smiled and said, “I am not supposed to be here, but Krishna has changed my destiny.” Lila thought that David must have taken some type of drug, so she said, “Why don’t you sit down and I will find someone who you can talk to.”

David knew that his time was slipping away, he ignored her comment and asked her, “If you could go anywhere in the world to have a secluded, peaceful life to live simply and continue with spiritual practices where would it be?”

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Lila was baffled, as the conversation seemed to be getting more bizarre, still she truthfully answered, “I would definitely go to India.”

Immediately David knew that India was the ideal place to become invisible. He asked Lila, “I need to leave today, I have written a letter to Premananda Swami, could you please give it to him?” Lila was confused and uncertain, but still felt that David was sincere so she agreed to take the letter from him.

David smiled and said, “I will always be grateful that you found me on the street, and brought me here so I could realize the *Maha mantra* is everything.”

David’s destiny was changed, he successfully got a new name, ID, passport and migrated to India, where he later got married, and lived a peaceful secluded life dedicated to spiritual growth.





# The Power of Prayer

*“When prayers are offered from the heart with sincere devotion, they become a very intricate part of the soul’s journey”*

-Radhanath Swami

Prayer is a powerful force and the most profound way in which we can transform our destiny. In the Bible, Jesus taught his followers that if they had true faith, they could move mountains with their prayer. Why do we then often experience that our prayers seem futile? The problem we experience with prayer is rooted in our misunderstanding of what a prayer is.

We sometimes misinterpret positive reinforcement phrases which we can repeat such as, “I am healthy, wealthy and wise” as a prayer. We sometimes misinterpret positive reinforcement phrases as prayers like: ‘I’m healthy, wealthy and wise’. Repetitions of such phrases might help develop a positive attitude. These phrases don’t encourage us to develop a relationship with God, so they are not prayers. However, if we approach God with some humility and ask Him for his blessings or help, we have entered the realm of prayer. The Bhagavad-Gita says that those who approach God sincerely asking Him to fulfill their desires are *sukritina* (pious).

When God answers our prayers, receiving what we asked is not the greatest benefit. The greatest benefit of prayer is that it helps us to develop a relationship with God.

If we turn to God in prayer when we are in need, we are establishing a pattern deep in our subconscious that God is our protector, provider, and shelter.

## **Dhruva prays for the greatest kingdom**

In the Bhagavata-Purana, we hear the story of a prince called Dhruva, who was insulted by his stepmother when she told him that he would never sit on the throne as the King. Although he was only a young boy, he was a *ksatriya*, a warrior by nature and became enraged. In his fury he ran to his mother and demanded that she remedy this situation. His mother knew that Dhruva's stepmother was the King's favorite wife and that she could not speak up against her.

Being a pious and religious woman, she tried to pacify Dhruva by saying "My dear Dhruva, please do not be consumed by your anger. I have seen that whenever a person has a strong desire to obtain a possession or position, they appeal to God by performing austerities."

Dhruva was determined to revenge his stepmother and demanded from his mother, "Where can I find God?" As she was a simple minded woman, she replied, "Since I was a small child I have heard that *yogis*, ascetics, and sages all go to the forest to find God. So God must be there."

Dhruva at once decided that he would go to the forest to fast and meditate until he would meet God so he could demand what he wanted – a kingdom much more opulent than that of his father; in fact, he wanted a kingdom more opulent than had ever been awarded to a mortal being. In the forest, he met sages whom he asked about the process of meditation. They instructed him to repeat the *mantra* "Om *Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya.*"



## *The Power of Prayer*

This powerful *mantra* has a variety of meanings, including, “I bow down to the God who is present in the hearts of everyone. My salutations to the Indwelling one, the substance of the Divine. Oh my Lord, the all pervading Personality of Godhead, I offer my respectful obeisances unto You. Salutations to the Indweller who is omnipresent, omnipotent, immortal, and divine.”

Motivated by his need for revenge, Dhruva performed austerities and chanted the *mantra* calling God for help.

After nine months of intense practices, Lord Vishnu (a form of God) blessed Dhruva by appearing to him. Being in the Divine presence of Vishnu completely transformed Dhruva’s heart. In complete adoration, He simply fell at Vishnu’s feet. Vishnu touched Dhruva softly on his head and asked him what blessing he desired.

Dhruva felt immense shame for his previous desires and said, “My dear Lord, I was looking for broken pieces of glass, but now I have seen a real diamond. I desire nothing else but to exist in your presence and experience your divine love. I beg you, just allow me to be with you and serve you eternally.”

Despite Dhruva’s transformation of heart, Vishnu had foreseen a different destiny for him. Knowing that he would be able to rule a kingdom with spiritual vision, he blessed Dhruva to receive a kingdom of much greater opulence than that of his father.

What can we learn from this narration? Dhruva’s destiny was to have lived in the shadow of his stepbrother, who would become king. Rather, Dhruva did not simply surrender to his destiny – instead he decided to dedicate his time and energy to spiritual practice to achieve the attention of God. Through his determination and dedication to meditation, Dhruva touched the heart of the Supreme Person. Vishnu came to him and decided to change Dhruva’s destiny.

## **Is God our order supplier?**

Is it wrong to ask for material blessings? If a person has a seriously ill family member, who would not pray for them to recover?

Approaching God for help when we are in difficulty is the most pious approach to deal with the situation. When we only continuously ask for material blessings we become stagnant in our spiritual growth.

Imagine you had a friend who only contacted you when he needed your help. Every time you would dutifully help him, and he would be grateful – but you would only hear again from him during his next crisis. How much depth could there be in such a relationship?

If you were a very kind and generous person, you would continue supporting him, but the level of satisfaction, which both would experience in the relationship, would be minimal.

In order for a relationship to be deeply satisfying, both persons involved should be striving to give more than they receive.

## **What is the result of material desires?**

When we see that our current situation is the result of our past lives actions and desires – we realize whatever difficulty we find ourselves in, we have brought it upon ourselves. As long as we cultivate material desires, we remain bound to the material realm, and cannot enter into the higher spiritual realms. If we want to evolve our consciousness, it is essential that we see the connection between our material desires and the pain that they bring into our lives.

Perhaps in our current lifetime, we may not be as wealthy as we would like to be. We may strongly desire to have magnificent wealth so we can live in a mansion, but we will not get it in this lifetime

## *The Power of Prayer*

since it is not our *karma*. Consequently, we will have to take birth again to obtain the wealth and the mansion we desire. As any other material opulence, it will come at a cost.

We will have to go through puberty again. We will have to study endless hours to obtain a qualification. We have to compete to succeed in our career. Then, once we have the mansion we have to continue to work to maintain it. We might have problems with all the workers and with criminals who try to steal our possessions. Again, we will see that our neighbour has a mansion that is double the size of ours, so we will desire a second mansion. Finally, when we establish ourselves as a fabulously wealthy person, we might doubt whether any of our friends, even our partner ever loved us, or if they were simply after our wealth. We will discover that many people despise us and are making plans to destroy our success.

Many people think that if they are religious, believe in God and follow some spiritual practices, then regardless of the multitude of their material desires, they are guaranteed to enter the spiritual realm at the end of their lives.

However, the reality is that our strongest desires will determine our next destination. Even in this life, our desires determine in which situations we will be.

Louisa is a religious woman, who visits the church on Sundays and attends a Bible study group on Wednesday evenings. During the week, she works every day 8am – 5pm, and after work, she goes to dance classes, reads, watches a movie, or dines out in a restaurant with friends. Most Saturdays, she will go out shopping and attend some entertainment. Louisa spends time with her family and goes hiking on Sundays, before going to church.

If Louisa were to die, what would she be doing, thinking? Where would she most likely be at the moment of death? If we said, well

she is a religious person, so surely she would have been thinking about God; doing something for God would not be rational. During her life, her focus, energy, thoughts, and activities did not revolve around God, so why would it change after her death? If she did not strongly desire to be engaged in spiritual activities, to be with God, to serve God, and glorify God before her death... Why would she be forced to go to the spiritual realm to do so after her death?

## **Praying for transformation**

If we objectively evaluate all our desires, we will conclude that several of our desires are binding us to the material realm. Our desires are indicating to God that we are more interested to pursue material goals and pleasure than to have a deep relationship with Him. God wants us to desire to be with Him, so when He sees that our strongest desires are to be in the material world, he will allow us to continue our existence here.

Instead of only approaching God with a wish list of our desires, we can ask Him to start releasing us from the desires, which keep us tied to the material realm. Instead of praying to be relieved from each painful situation, we can pray for deeper insights, humility and strength. Ultimately, we should come to pray for transformation of our hearts. One can pray thus:

Dear Lord,  
Let my lust transform into love  
Let my anger transform into service  
Let my envy transform into compassion  
Let my greed transform into gratitude  
Let my illusion transform into knowledge.

## *The Power of Prayer*

Authentic prayer allows us to enter into a conversation with God, and we reveal our heart as we would to our most trusted friends. Keeping a prayer journal can be a profound way to start expressing our feelings towards God. Prayer can evolve from placing “an order” to include a sincere request to know and serve God. As we want to pray in an authentic way, we can express different moods of worship, glorify, begging for help, asking for blessings, or expressing our gratitude.

### **Praying as saints do**

Another way to pray is to recite the prayers of previous advanced spiritual practitioners. When reciting such prayers we should be careful to not fall into the trap of doing it in a mechanical or ritualistic way. Instead, we can meditate on the emotions, mood, and motivation of the author and try to create a similar mood in our hearts. We appreciate music as it expresses feelings or experience that we cannot express through our own words. When we are listening to music, which reflects our mood, it can enhance and deepen our emotions.

Furthermore reciting prayers can help us enhance, deepen and express our spiritual emotions. When we recite a prayer, we could do it with such focus and feeling, that although it is not our words, it moves our heart.

Praying as saints do might seem pretentious, as they ask only for service, love and sacrifice. One of the glorious characters of Mahabharata, Queen Kunti for instance prayed: “O Lord, as the Ganges forever flows to the sea without hindrance, let my attraction be constantly drawn unto You without being diverted to anyone else.”

While having some genuine desire to move closer towards God, we still have endless other desires which are demanding our

attention. So how can we recite these prayers in a sincere way? The answer lies in reminding ourselves of our eternal identity, in which we exist in a pure loving relationship with God. Now we find that our true self is covered, hidden, and possibly unperceivable to ourselves. As we recite the prayers of previous saints, we gradually awaken our spiritual identity. Prayers are not only for saints, but also for all of us, who desire to come closer to God's divine desire for our lives.

## **God the almighty vs God the supreme lover**

Why would we want to align ourselves with God's desires? If we are God's servants, how do we know he is a loving master? Many of us have experienced that when we place our trust in our parents, superiors, teachers, leaders, and authorities, they disappoint, hurt, mislead or even exploit and abuse us. One spiritual teacher said that in a material relationship, trying to trust someone means, "I place my head on your lap, but then you cut my throat." If we have been through such experience, we might feel resistant to the idea of surrendering to God, as we fear He might treat us in a similar way. We might see God as a powerful figure, a ruler, creator, controller who judges, condemns and sometimes gives blessings.

However, there is a more personal understanding of the nature and character God. *Bhakti* scriptures describe God with many names as *Bhakta-Vatsala*, which means He is the dearest friend of his devotees. He is Krishna, the one who can attract everyone's heart, as He is the Supreme Lover.

Krishna is ever youthful, He is artistic, poetic, humorous, cunning, and He loves to dance. His paramount desire is to love each soul and be loved by each soul. When our perception of God evolves to this higher understanding, we can become attracted to being in His divine presence.

## *The power of Prayer*

Once we have experienced the soothing shelter of His divine presence, we will desire to experience it more and more. If we have higher consciousness, it will also inspire us to bring others closer to Him. In all spiritual traditions we see that the saints have prayed for others more than they have prayed for themselves.

One such prayer is *loka samastha sukhino bhavantu*, which means “Dear Lord, may all the people find peace and happiness in this world. May I develop compassion and non-jealousness and be a part of the progressive world.”

## ***Sanskrit* mantra prayers – The power of spiritual language**

One can also follow the ancient spiritual practice of writing down sacred *Sanskrit* mantras, which glorify the Supreme Divinity. *Sanskrit-mantras* have the ability to dissolve our material perception of the world and awaken us to the spiritual realms and personalities contained within these sounds.

*Sanskrit* is a spiritual language – spoken or more accurately sung eternally by personalities in the highest realms of the creation. By hearing, reading and reciting *Sanskrit* mantras we are connecting ourselves to the highest realms of creation. There are also specific *mantras* for each day of the week, which one can chant to connect with specific manifestations of the Supreme Divinity. When we chant these *mantras* in a prayerful mood, we are glorifying God, deepening our connection with the *Paramatma* (the Supersoul or Divine spark within us).

The *Paramatma* is seated within our hearts and knows our every thought, desires, need and longing. His desire is to see us become fully awakened to our spiritual nature and He will provide us the ideal situation to evolve.





# Pilgrimage in your mind

*“Mayapur is the topmost, as taking shelter of it, the living entities can cross over Kali-yuga. What one attains by travelling to all the holy places is attained just by remembering Mayapur.”*

-Navadvipa Dhama Mahatmya

**A**s *Kali Yuga* progresses the entire planet, society, politics, personal health, and relationships become more and more degraded. Yet amongst the growing challenges, there are advantages for those who desire to spiritually grow.

In previous *yugas*, a person would accumulate unfavorable karma for all their bad thoughts, desires or ideas. While a person could only accumulate good *karma* or make spiritual advancement if they performed righteous or spiritual acts.

However, in *Kali Yuga* the situation is different. A person does not accumulate any unfavorable karma regardless of the amount of negative and nasty thoughts, desires or ideas he has. One will only accumulate unfavorable *karma* when one acts selfish, unjust, improper, and violent. What is more, by simply thinking, meditating or desiring to perform virtuous or spiritual activities, one immediately receives all the benefit of performing it.

## *Awaken Your Spiritual Destiny*

Henceforth by meditating on visiting holy places, one receives the benefits and blessings of going on a pilgrimage. Regardless of where we might find ourselves in the world, one can daily do a pilgrimage meditation visiting holy places such as *Vrindavana* or *Mayapur*.

By visiting these holy places, one encounters the unique spiritual energy of a pilgrimage site and one can become spiritually surcharged. This kind of pilgrimage meditation helps us to accumulate *sukriti*, piousness, which opens the doorway to deeper spiritual joy. My aunt, Janaki, who lives in USA, visualizes herself visiting holy places daily and feels it has bought her joy and deep insights.

How should we approach a pilgrimage meditation? The key to entering and experiencing the value of a holy place is the state of our consciousness. Thus if we desire to visit a holy place in our meditation, we need to prepare ourselves to enter a sacred inner space. Below is a guided meditation one can use to visit the birthplace of Lord Caitanya, *Yoga Pitha, Sri Mayapur Dhama*.



## **A Visit to Mayapur**

- Gently settle into a comfortable sitting position and straighten out your spine slowly closing your eyes.

- As you exhale, release all of the worldly thoughts or concerns.

- For the next 15-20 min, you will enter into a safe inner sacred space.

- With your eyes closed, focus on lengthening your spine inward and upward. Allow your body to soften and relax, while your spine remains tall.

- Begin to observe your breath.

- Notice how the breath is moving in and out — like waves in the ocean. Follow the flow of your breath with your mind.

- If your mind wanders, simply bring it back to the flow of your breath, to turn your awareness within. Remain attentive and relaxed at the same time.

- For the next few minutes, you are going to practice a very slow and positive long breathing.

- Slowly deepen your inhale and your exhale through your nose. Make each inhalation deeper and each exhalation slower.

- Gradually become aware how the length of the inhalation, and the length of the exhalation become equal.

- Now make your exhale longer than the inhale. By lengthening the exhalation, the mind begins to think inward.

- As you continue, notice that you are becoming deeply calm, yet also fully aware of your inner state of consciousness.

- Return to normal breathing. Observe your breath as it naturally flows inward and outward. Your breath is the primary source of your *prana* – your life energy.

## *Awaken Your Spiritual Destiny*

- In the Bhagavad-Gita Krsna says that He is the *prana*, the life force. *Prana* is our constant associate throughout our entire lives.
- Now we have entered inner consciousness and we are ready for a journey to Sri Mayapur Dhama in Navadvipa. Our bodies will be comfortably in our chairs and we are eager to experience a pilgrimage.
- Brahma-samhita, one of the oldest known books, states that the top most realms in the spiritual world, Goloka Vrindavana are manifested in the shape of a transcendental lotus.
- Mayapur is on an island, Antardvipa, which is one of a group of nine islands, which is also in the form of an eight petaled lotus, laying on the water of the ocean of West Bengal.



## *Pilgrimage in your mind*

- Navadwipa is a transcendental place, and those with complete spiritual vision can see that it is identical to the realm of Goloka Vrindavana.

- When you arrive in Navadwipa, you notice that there is a brilliant full moon rising over the glorious Ganges River whose celestial waters have become luminous.

- As you walk next to the Ganges a gentle cooling breeze blows, carrying the aroma of lilies and lotuses lying on the water.

- At some places, the Ganga is calm and deep while other places it bursts with speed, her waters forming beautiful curves.

- As you continue walking along the Ganges you can hear the sound of her deep voice singing a sacred song.

- On the banks the vegetation is lush bearing flowers and fruits, adorning Ganga like a garland.

- You see local devotees doing beautiful *puja*, worship, and ceremonies to Ganga. They are offering flowers, incense, brightly burning lamps and songs in her glorification.

- Now you walk inland away from the Ganga to the center of Mayapur to see *Yoga Pitha*, the birthplace of Lord Gauracandra, who is the Soul of all souls.

- As you walk along the main road of Mayapur you feel the gentle moon rays, in the distance you hear hymns being sung and *arati* (worship) being performed in temples.

- The air is fresh with the smell of rain and carries the aroma of jasmine flowers.

- As you enter the gates of *Yoga Pith*, you see a large attractive temple.

- On your right, you notice a small shrine with murti of the

great *Bhakti* saint, Bhaktivinoda Thakur. If you desire, you can bow down and ask him to bless you on your spiritual journey.

- You continue to walk and see Gaura Kunda (lake) the personal bathing place of Gauracandra, upon which a boat is resting. You carefully walk down the moss covered steps, kneel down and reach your hand into the sacred waters to gather a few drops to sprinkle on your head.

- You can sit here for some time, and absorb the transcendental energy of Gaura Kunda.

- When you are ready to continue, slowly get up, climb up the stairs and walk towards the open-air temple.

- You notice a small group of *sadhus* (spiritual practitioners), sitting and playing *mrdanga* (type of drum) and *kartalas* (hand symbols), while singing a *bhajan* (a composed prayer). Their singing is a glorification of the Supreme and an offering to the beautiful deities on the altar. Here you can also bow down and offer your respects to the Supreme.

- Now you see a large Neem tree with seemingly unlimited multi colored prayer ropes tied around it. This is the sacred birthplace of Gauracandra.

- As you move closer, you feel that you are entering a sacred prayer space. Following the pilgrimage tradition, you walk around the Neem tree thrice in a prayerful mood.

- Next to the neem tree, you see the deities of Gauracandra's parents, Saci Devi and Jagannath Misra in a small building. They are transcendental personalities who descended from the spiritual world to act as Gauracandra's parents.

- Behind the small building, you notice a Shiva Linga in



## *Pilgrimage in your mind*

a small Shrine. Shiva plays an important role here; he is Dhamesvara, the protector of the dhama. If we want to gain entrance into and experience the spiritual dimension of this Holy place, we need Shiva's blessings. Here you can bow down before Shiva, circumambulate the Lingam thrice and ask for spiritual vision.

- You can now sit down quietly and take a deep breath, inhaling the energy of *Yoga Pitha*, and of Mayapur. Feel the energy from this powerful holy place move into the core of your being. Experience how by visiting the pilgrimage place you have made deep imprints in your heart – spiritual beacons that become part of the map of your spiritual quest.

- Then slowly bring your awareness back to your breath, inhaling deeply and exhaling slowly. Move your awareness back to the external world, and slowly open your eyes.

Throughout the rest of your day, try to keep the visit to Mayapur alive in your consciousness. If you can stay connected to the transcendental energy, you will share it with everyone you meet.







# The Matrix of the Modes

*This divine energy of Mine, consisting of the three modes of material nature, is difficult to overcome. But those who have surrendered unto Me can easily cross beyond it.*

-Bhagavad Gita 7.14

## Why do we fail to change?

If the soul is a pure transcendental being, how do we find ourselves so helplessly pulled by one desire after the other? Why does it seem that we are constrained by identities, habits, addictions, patterns, judgments, likes, and dislikes?

While suffering the consequences of overeating, a person might be lamenting, promising himself that he will never repeat the same mistake. Yet it is just a matter of time before he finds himself over-indulging again. Those who have suffered from hangovers, or any other form of post-partying side effects, will probably be able to recall feeling utterly miserable the next day and vowing not to go to the same extremes again. But then when the next Friday evening presents itself, the insane headache seems like a very distant memory, or even something imagined, so one again finds oneself going wild “one last time.”

Even when we realize that our behavior or habits are counterproductive or even harmful, why do we fail to change? Are there external forces, which dictate our lives? Are we perhaps the prisoners of a matrix in which our freedom is an illusion? Why do we fail to transform even when we repent and desire to change? These questions have troubled the minds of spiritual seekers through history of humankind.

The Vedic scriptures compare our repenting to an elephant's bathing routine. Elephants daily go to a river, emerge themselves in the water, and have a good bath. Then, once they are out, they immediately look for a good sandy spot for a dust bath. Similarly, deeply engrained impressions of behavioral patterns, our *samskaras*, can control us.

## **The three modes of material nature**

If we turn to the Bhagavad-Gita for insight we hear that the material world is operated by the *tri gunas* (three modes of material nature) – *tamas* (ignorance), *rajas* (passion), and *sattva* (goodness). The *tri gunas* control us as the ropes tied to a marionette control its movements.

The marionette is distinctly different from the ropes, but the ropes control each of its movements. Is it possible that we are under such stringent control of an external force? If we are, is there any way to become free?

The *tri gunas* are energies that govern every aspect of the material world. One can think about the *tri gunas* as the absolute autocratic authorities on the material plane. Individuals living under the jurisdiction of an absolute ruler have freedom to make some decisions but only within the boundaries of the autocrat's laws. Parallel in the material world, everything and everyone is moving within the laws of the *tri gunas*.

## *The Matrix of the Modes*

This proposition might sound outrageous. Who would consent to such a confined existence? However, while we do not comprehend how the *tri gunas* operate, their invisible ropes will control us. The *tri-gunas* function like a matrix, all living entities are convened in space, behavior and thought by the *tri-gunas* – but they cannot perceive the chains that are constraining their existence.

For example, bears are controlled by *tamo guna* (mode of ignorance), and that makes a living entity lethargic. Bears are controlled by *tamo guna* to such an extent that they spend half their lives sleeping. Bears do not think they should be more productive, they are completely content to sleep away half of their lives.

Horses, on the other hand, are mostly controlled by *rajo guna*, (mode of passion) which makes a living being alert and energetic. If one horse in a herd gets frightened, and starts running, the entire herd starts running along. They never wonder if they should first investigate the danger, or rather save their energy. They just run until they are exhausted.

Humans have the capacity to be more aware and mindful of their behaviour. However, if we objectively analyze our lives, we will see that the majority of our thoughts, the way we speak, walk, act and respond – is automatic. We can revisit the example of Alex who is going on a journey by plane to make it more clear how we are limited by the *tri gunas*. A person's *karma* will create his life, which is like the plane journey; his place and experience on the plane is similar to the influence of the *tri gunas*.

If a person is in the standard economic class, that can be compared to being controlled by the *rajo guna* (the mode of passion). If a person finds himself in the bottom of the airplane, in the dark space where the luggage is kept – which is not meant for humans – that situation will be compared to being controlled by *tama guna* (the mode of

ignorance). If a person is so fortunate to find himself in first class, that can be compared to be under the control of *sattva guna* (mode of goodness). What determines which mode will control us?

## **How are we caught up in the mode matrix?**

If you would continuously visit a foreign country you would start picking up local mannerisms, perhaps speak the language, start liking the local food – and the more you would be there the more you would have to submit yourself to the government.

In a similar way as we associate with certain times of the day, places, food, people and activities which carry the energy of a specific mode, our consciousness will take on that energy. The good news is – we can choose to go visit another country or not. In the same way, each of us can ask ourselves, “*Which energy do I want to absorb and radiate?*”

## ***Tamo Guna* – the bottomless pit**

*Tamo guna*, the mode of ignorance, brings a person into deeper and deeper illusion while bringing forth confusion, idleness and lethargy. A person under influence of *tamas* will be disinterested in any knowledge, apathetic, addicted to mind altering substances, lazy and sleepy.

Places which are dirty, where people are intoxicated and cruel as brothels, butcheries and drug houses are full of tamasic energy. Can we achieve anything good by being in these places? Regardless of your motivation for visiting these places, when you come in the territory of *tamo guna* – it will pollute your consciousness.

*Tamasic* food is old, moldy, fermented, and unhealthy. Eating such food will do your body and mind harm and cause disease. Animals

who are *tamasic* will happily eat the most repulsive things. Comparably, persons who are *tamasic* will eat food without considering if it is clean, fresh, and nutritious or even tastes good.

These *tamasic* people will also be depressed, anxious, fearful, uncertain, and directionless. Being in contact with *tamasic* energy takes away our energy, enthusiasm and leaves us confused. *Tamo guna* makes us addicted to destructive behavior and brings out the worst version of who we could be. It is like a bottomless black hole; it will take you further and further down. If *tamo guna* is so repulsive, how do people get attracted to this energy and fall under its control?

## **How the King of heaven became a pig**

In the Vedas, we read the story about Lord Indra, who is king of all demigods and lives in a heavenly planet called Indraloka. Indra has the most exquisite palace, the most opulent food, the most beautiful entertainers and the most stunning wife Saci Devi. As the king of all demigods, Indra is entailed to the highest quality of living.

There came a time when receiving respect, praise and adoration from all the other demigods made Indra proud of his position and forgetful of the importance of showing respect to others. One day when Indra's spiritual master Brihaspati arrived, Indra remained seated on his jewelled throne failing to acknowledge the arrival of his *guru*.

Brihaspati, ashamed to see the vanity of his disciple, decided to curse Indra to become a wild hog. From being the highest royalty in heaven, Indra fell down to live on the earth planet as a wild pig. Indra quickly adapted to his new life, found joy in taking mud bath sand found a pig wife with whom he had several piglets. His life seemed perfectly fulfilling as he had a family, lived in a cave and ate from

village rubbish dumps. Meanwhile, in the heavenly planets there was a crisis as no one else had been able to step up to Indra's place to rule.

Out of dismay, the demigods approached Lord Brahma, the creator of the universe, and asked if he could reinstall Indra as king. Lord Brahma realized he needed to remedy the situation and went down to the earth planet to ask Indra to return. Upon seeing Lord Brahma, Indra could not recognize him and was astonished at the luminous celestial being.

Indra being perplexed asked Brahma, "Who are you mystical creature, and why have you come here?" Brahma responded, "Indra, you are the king of heaven, I am Brahma the creator of the cosmos. Your guru cursed you to become a pig, but now we need you to return to your position to govern the heavens." Indra in complete disbelief snorted, "Who is this Indra? I am Husker, the wild boar. Why do you say such nonsensical things? I have been a pig all my life and besides, I am perfectly content with my life and there is nothing more I desire."

Brahma tried to pursue Indra, "But before you were a pig you were the most powerful, influential and important person in heaven – the head of all demigods. Your position, palace, wealth, and beautiful wife are waiting for your return. You might have forgotten this, but surely, you would like to be the ruler of heaven?"

Indra simply grunted and said, "Look, man, get real, I am a pig, not a demigod. See, here is my pig wife, have you ever seen such a fair pig face? There under the tree, you can see my first batch of piglets. I think they are the most adorable. What delights could heaven offer me that compares to what I have now? Heaven sounds like a dull place with a lot of work and responsibility." Indra snorted and returned to roll in the mud with his pig family.

Brahma realized he could not convince Indra of his heavenly position with words alone and reverted to take drastic action. Right in front of Indra's eyes, he mercilessly slaughtered his pig wife and then his pig children. Indra screamed in rage, rolled on the ground wailing in sorrow, but still was completely convinced of his pig identity. Brahma turned to his last resort and slew Indra's pig body.

When the big boar's body fell dead on the ground, Indra awoke from his illusion. He realized that he had been carried away by the pig part he was playing. Indra was deeply grateful that Brahma had come to save him from his misconception and returned to this glorious post in heaven.

## **What can we learn from Indra becoming a pig?**

We can become convinced to believe that any state of existence, no matter how dirty, repulsive and meaningless, is glorious and pleasurable. We can become attached to whatever situation, culture or habits we are accustomed to, and be convinced that it is the ideal. Pigs relish eating stool, while a human being would feel nausea simply by the thought of it. This demonstrates the inconceivable power of the *tama guna* to distort our vision to see misery as joy.

Bhagavad-Gita explains that *tamo guna* keeps us unconscious of all the suffering it causes us. If we suffer without being aware of it, is that really an undesirable situation? Is there truth in the statement, 'Ignorance is bliss'. Let us examine the consequences of being unaware of suffering.

If a person contracts leprosy, the disease affects their nervous system so that their bodies become so numb in certain parts that they do not experience pain when injured. Because their brains do not register

when their body is hurt, it often results in them seriously injuring themselves and deforming their bodies.

We can conclude that when we are unaware of our suffering, we do not realize the extent of harm we can inflict upon ourselves. This is definitely not a promising situation to be in if we desire spiritual growth.

## ***Rajo Guna* – the hot fire**

*Rajo guna* is a bit more complicated to understand, as Bhagavad-Gita explains, “*Rajo guna* is nectar in the beginning, but poison in the end.” It creates unlimited desires in a person and pushes them to pursue their desires ceaselessly. When we are under the influence of *rajo guna*, we will have intense attraction to romance, fame, prestige, and power.

*Rajo guna* gives speed, excitement, burning intensity, crazy enthusiasm, and unlimited drive to succeed. Nowadays, cities are a manifestation of society’s collective consciousness under the influence of *rajo guna*. The mentality of the people is work, buy, consume, and then die. Everyone’s energy is channeled towards produce, control, and enjoy.

In order to increase their enjoyment they need to increase their exploitation of others and the earth. They are determined to conquer, and cage nature, so it will fulfill their desires. In cities, there are endless activities, production and achievement – it all comes at a high cost. People are under intense pressure to perform which increases their anxiety, stress, nervous breakdowns or dependency on drugs.

*Rajo guna* is like fire; it is very powerful and useful but potentially dangerous. When fire is under control, we can use it for cooking,



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warming, and purifying elements like gold. However if fire is out of control it will rage and mercilessly bring devastation.

The more we are under the influence of *rajo guna*, the more we experience intense desires and attachment to have everything our way. This mentality is a recipe for frustration, anger, and pain. The more we try to control situations and people the higher our expectations are. The more we are determined to have things our way the greater our disappointment will be when life does not deliver the right results.

Is there a way we can utilize *rajasic* energy so that we are benefited from it? Spiritual teachers' advise that we dedicate the energy, enthusiasm, and drive towards spiritual purposes and goals. Instead of acting ruthlessly to achieve and prosper, we can work with the same intensity, but let higher principles determine our actions and decisions.

When we set aside solely pursuing our personal desires and instead work to serve others, *rajo guna* can assist us to be productive, progressive, and successful in making a spiritual contribution to the world. If we thus learn to harness the energy of *rajo guna* to serve in harmony with God's desire, the fire of *rajo guna* will purify us as a fire purifies gold.

## ***Sattva guna* – the bridge to transcendence**

*Sattva guna* is purer than the other gunas. It is illuminating, and it brings us to knowledge and enables us to become free from unfavorable karma. A person who is influenced by *sattva guna* will be peaceful, content, kind, and desiring to uplift others. *Sattva guna* provides the energy that allows us to be consistent, steady and grounded. It enables us to act for the best long-term results. *Sattva guna* creates the energy that one can experience in the early morning, when the world is quite, the mind is clear and our thoughts are focused. A place under the

influence of *sattva guna* will be clean, organized, uncluttered, and light. The key characteristics of *sattva guna* are harmony, balance, and tranquility, which bring a sense of relief into our lives. A quiet meditative walk in a natural forest along a river with pristine nature will bring us closer to *sattvic* energy.

Although *sattva guna* may sound attractive to some people, to others it may sound just too dull and predictable. What is the value of *sattva guna*? Bhagavad-Gita describes that *sattva guna* is like poison in the beginning and nectar in the end. It is like food, which is wholesome and nourishing to the mind and body. If we are habituated to eat junk food, healthy food may not appeal to us at all. The food will seem bland and unsatisfying.

If we develop a serious health issue due to our poor eating habits, our doctor might insist that we follow a very healthy diet. Initially we will find the diet very constraining and we will crave junk food. With time as our bodies and minds adjust to the new diet and we experience the benefit, we will appreciate the healthy diet. Similarly, if we slowly start to follow a more *sattvic* lifestyle with time we will come to experience and understand the benefits for us.

When we live a *sattvic* life, we become more content, accepting and tolerant which brings us into a more peaceful state of existence. While we continue dutifully with our work, and remain dedicated to our relationships, we realize we are not in control of what the results will be. We perceive that whatever life presents us is an essential part of our spiritual journey.

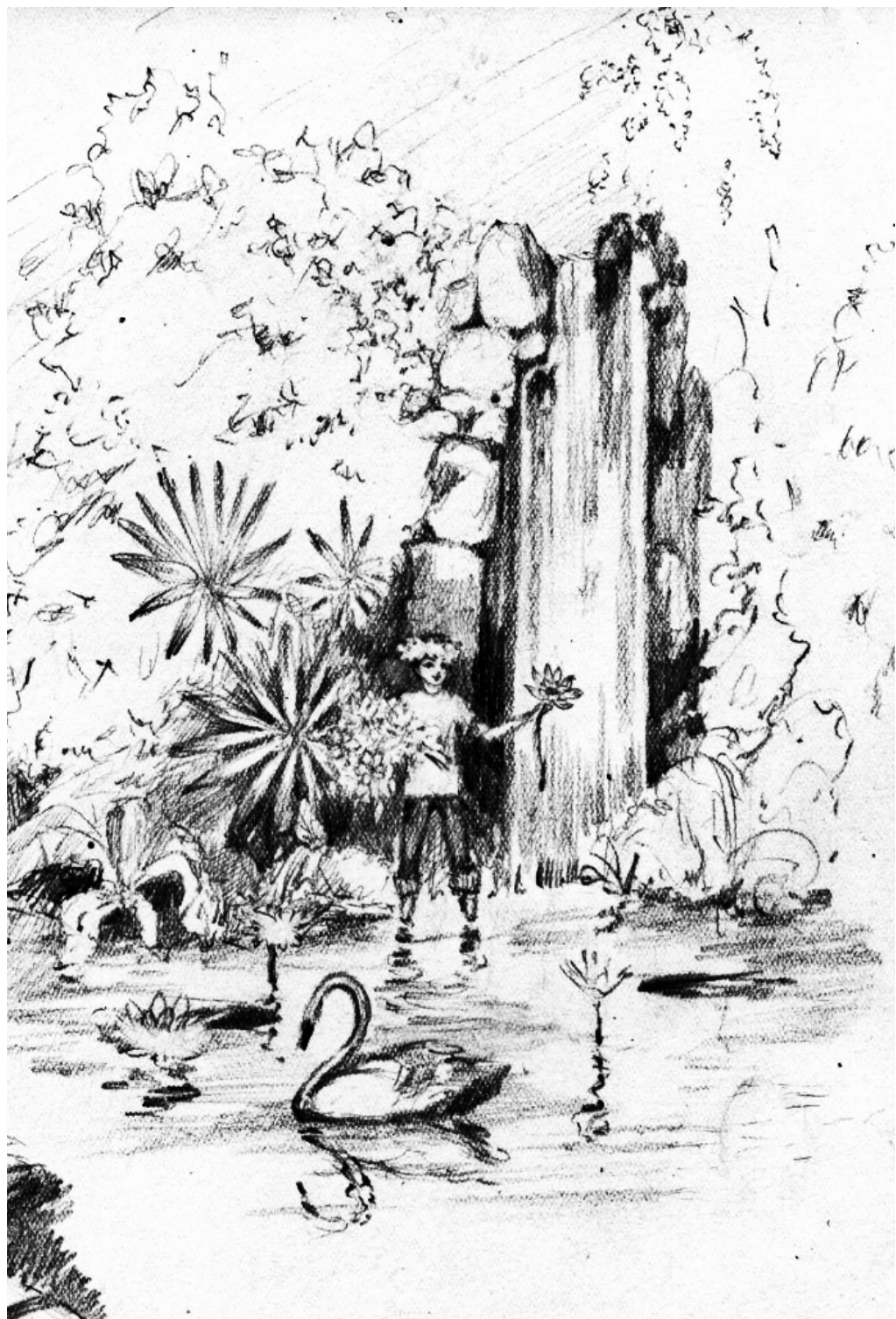
This detachment brings us a great sense of freedom. *Sattvic* living makes our mind focused, memory sharp and discrimination clear.

We realize how to make decisions that are in harmony with our spiritual needs, the conservation of the environment and the welfare of others.

## *The Matrix of the Modes*

Living a *sattvic* life is attractive. Furthermore, the Bhagavad-Gita states that it is only a bridge to transcendence. *Sattva guna* is like the airport; it is the official place from where you can board a flight. On some rare occasions, an airplane might take off from outside the airport. Nevertheless, if you want to be certain to get a flight, you will go to the airport. While the airport might be the most modern development in our city, with latest technology, art displays and excellent restaurants, ultimately we are there to board our plane so we can reach our desired destination.

Likewise, the real value of *sattva guna* is that it brings us to a state of consciousness from which we can follow *sadhana* (spiritual practices). *Sadhana* is the only key that can open the door to leave the matrix of the modes. *Sadhana* is the airplane, which will transport us to transcendence.



# Higher Principles

## The wolf of lower desires

As I travel around the world, I often inquire about people, whether they believe in God. The most common response has become, “I am spiritual, but not religious.” I appreciate that more people are acknowledging that they are eternal spiritual beings. However, when I hear how much their lives are filled with destructive habits it is clear that they are controlled by *tamo guna* and *rajo guna*, resultantly they are not reaching their highest potential.

Although they aspire to change *tamo guna* and *rajo guna* has such a strong hold on them that they fail to experience transformation. I observe how their lifestyles destroy their potential. What can we conclude? If we follow principle-centered lives, we will reach our highest potential.

*Our spiritual nature is dormant within us, like the ability to speak is dormant within a newborn child.* The child’s parents will need to help him develop his speaking skills. If we left a child in the wilderness it might somehow survive, but it will not speak. Equally, each person has the potential to be self-realized, but this requires that they overcome their lower desires.

A tropical flower will flourish in a tropical region, it may be able to grow in a region (another type of climate), but will die in a desert

region. Similarly, our spirituality can flourish when we adhere to higher principles. If we sometimes give in to our lower desires, our spirituality can survive. Anyhow, if we give free reign to our lower desires, our spirituality will die.

Awakening our spiritual identity is like cultivating a sacred plant, which can bring forth flowers of divine love. If we sincerely desire to see these flowers, we need to ensure we prepare the soil, water, nourish, and protect the plant. We nourish and water our spiritual self by spiritual practices such as meditation and discussions of sacred texts. This however will be futile, if we do not also protect ourselves from our lower desires.

We can compare our lower desires to a dangerous wild animal, like a wolf. Even if you think you know the wolf, you will never know when it will sneak up from behind and attack you. One way you can deal with the wolf is to place it in an area with strong fences, so that there is a barrier between it and humans. When the wolf is inside poachers will not be able to harm him and neither will he be able to attack people. Likewise, if we follow higher principles they act like strong walls that protect our spiritual growth from our lower desires and from external influences.

## **Will higher principles constrain us?**

If we grew up in a culture in which people do not follow higher principles, it may seem these principles will restrict our human nature. That is true; these principles will restrict all our harmful behavior, which we initially might find frustrating. However, if we tolerate our feelings of frustration and continue to follow these principles we are gradually reprogramming our minds to reach higher consciousness.

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Ultimately, these principles enable us to express love towards ourselves, love towards others and love towards God.

A parent might have no interest in visiting a pet zoo to see miniature horses, but because their three-year-old daughter loves to go, they will accompany her. Even if it means that they have to sacrifice their own plans, the parent still takes their daughter, as they know it makes her happy. What is more is that they do not do it in a grudging way; rather they experience satisfaction knowing that their daughter will be pleased.

In any relationship we find that to express love requires some sacrifice, but when we see the joy of our beloved the sacrifice becomes our joy.

Therefore, if we want to experience the highest type of love, we should be willing to sacrifice our lower desires. When we do so, we are empowering our higher self to develop.

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### • **Principle one: Sex is sacred**

Is having unrestrained sexual relationships detrimental to our spiritual advancement? Sexual attraction is the most powerful energy and it can completely control us. There are unlimited accounts of people who had powerful positions who became victims of their sexual desire and as result lost their reputation, position or even lives. There is the classical story of Julius Caesar and Cleopatra, who fell in love with, and kidnapped Helen of Troy, which resulted in a war. Most countries have seen respected married government officials having affairs with their secretaries.

## **Lost in lust**

Another story of a person who became lost in lust is that of a priest named Bilvamangala Thakura. Bilvamangala Thakura was born in a *Brahmin* (priest) family and lived on the eastern bank of the holy river Krishna-Veni in South India.

Since his childhood, he has studied the scriptures and later became a great renowned scholar. His family was wealthy and he married a beautiful high-class woman. The society considered him highly intelligent, cultured and successful.

In fact Bilvamangala had one secret – he had fallen in love with a young girl, Cintamani, who was a prostitute and dancer. Being unable to stay loyal to his wife or follow his vows as a priest, he had an ongoing affair with Cintamani. Although Cintamani lived on the opposite bank of the river Krishna-Veni, Bilvamangala made a plan to visit every night without fail.

He became so obsessed with Cintamani that meeting her completely preoccupied his mind. Throughout the entire day, he would be meditating on what he needed to do to see her in the evening. He started to minimize all his other responsibilities and relationships.

On the day that his father died, he arranged the traditional cremation ceremony. Even while watching his father's body burning, he was hankering to meet Cintamani.

After the cremation, some more rituals were required. Bilvamangala could however only think of Cintamani and in frustration asked the priest, "How long will it still take to complete all these elaborate rituals? I have to go!" He hastily did his required parts in the ceremonies and as soon as it was completed, he rushed off to Cintamani.



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In his haste he had failed to notice that dark clouds had gathered in the sky and that a storm was about to break out. As it became dark the thunder and torrents of rain raged from the sky – but this did not discourage the passion of Bilvamangala. He simply ran through the rain to reach the bank of the Krishna-Veni.

When he reached the river, he saw that the river's water made violent movements. There was no one in sight and no sane boatman would dare to cross the river. Bilvamangala decided to cross the raging river with resolute determination. He began swimming across the rampant torrent. He swam half way through the river, and then became so exhausted that he was at the point of drowning. In desperation, he grabbed on to what appeared to be a floating log. Upon grabbing it, he realized it was a corpse, but he simply grabbed on tighter and struggled across the river.

In the meantime Cintamani hearing the storm raging resolved, "It is late and this fierce storm has reigned since early this evening. It is impossible to travel in this storm, so Bilvamangala should not come tonight." She locked the garden gates, bolted the door, shut all the windows and retired to her bedroom.

At the same time Bilvamangala barely managed to cross the river and then continued his struggle through the darkness, mud and howling wind. Upon reaching the residence of Cintamani, he found someone had bolted the gate from within. He shook the gates and shouted her name with all his vigor, but it was of no avail. The deafening thunder, boisterous winds and torrential rains deadened his cries.

Still Bilvamangala's desire to meet Cintamani would not let him stop. Nothing could dishearten his intense passion – he was in the grip of his frantic infatuation. The weather-beaten, but passionate, Bilvamangala started climbing over the wall, but the wall was too

high and steep. As he started slipping, he noticed the tail of a snake going through a hole in the top of the wall. He grabbed onto the snake's tail and miraculously succeeded in leaping over, but crashed on the ground screaming out in pain. Cintamani heard the crash and agonizing cry, and rushed outside to find Bilvamangala unconscious and profusely bleeding.

Cintamani called her female friends and they carried Bilvamangala into her room. There she nursed him tenderly as he hung between life and death. Cintamani was utterly distraught to see how Bilvamangala's obsession with their sexual relationship had driven him to such extreme irrational behavior. She felt deeply remorseful, as she knew she had seduced several men. She sorrowfully started crying and singing verses addressing God as the only true lover.

When Bilvamangala recovered consciousness, she pitied him for his insane infatuation, saying, "I am conscious of my own promiscuous life and profession. You are meant to be a priest! Has all your studying of scriptures not taught you anything? Can you see how your obsession with me is destroying you? If you had half the dedication you have to enjoy my body, to serve God you would have been an angel by now!"

Cintamani's words came to Bilvamangala as a revelation from God. Suddenly his gross obsession with enjoying with her seemed shameful. Remorse arose in Bilvamangala's heart as he could see how he had become a slave of lust. Taking Cintamani's words as an instruction, he realized she was his *vartma-pradarsaka guru*, the *guru* who bestows spiritual vision. Bilvamangala made a vow in his heart to renounce his attachment and move to the holy town of Vrindavana. After a few days when he had regained his strength, Bilvamangala expressed his gratitude to Cintamani and left to travel to Vrindavana.

What can we learn from Bilvamangala's story?

## **What is lust?**

We are all deeply desiring to experience love that is complete and unconditional. It is part of our eternal identity; it is our birthright to seek love, which is independent from motivation. Yet when we examine our own lives, we will see that our 'love' is motivated, conditional, and fleeting. If we are very honest, we will see that what we identify as 'love' is often 'lust'.

The Bhagavad-Gita explains that when we misuse the energy of love, it turns it into lust. If we express our sexuality through lust, then we are devolving our consciousness. Lust is a very strong desire to enjoy and to use other people to bring ourselves pleasure.

What is the result of being lustful? We focus our energy to acquire distinction, adoration, and praise. We desire to possess, dominate, and control another person. If a woman has a boyfriend, she tries to stop him from speaking, looking or even thinking about any other women, as he must be only hers. If the boyfriend is hopelessly attracted to gorgeous women, he becomes under her control, as he will do anything to please her.

Lust also creates the desire to be adored and worshipped by other people. We have all seen persons who always are dressing, talking and behaving in ways to attract as much attention to them as possible. If they are not the center of attention, they become sulky, frustrated, and angry.

Imagine a club scene, people come to dance, drink and be a hunter or be the hunted. While the women are dancing on a stage, sometimes even on the tables, the men are looking at them with hungry eyes. They describe and rate the women only in terms of their sensuality, their breast and their buttocks, while the women are wearing skimpy

clothes, dancing in suggestive ways displaying themselves as sex objects. In such situations, people are expressing their lowest consciousness and the mood is, 'Let us exploit each other'.

## **The media and hyper sexuality**

Currently the media has perfected the art of sexualizing women and men to the extreme that sexuality has become a primary identity for most people. Almost all consumer products use sexuality for advertisement. What is the message the media delivers?

Having a great sex appeal makes a person successful. If one possesses and consumes these products – then one will have more empowered sex life! Our existence should revolve around sex.

In order to protect ourselves, we need to be aware how the media affects our consciousness. Watching television affects our brain to move into an alpha state, which is similar to hypnosis. This state makes us more receptive to suggestions than usual. Whatever image or idea we see on television, we are more likely to accept and assimilate it, than we would have in real life.

Each idea and image are deeply imprinted in our minds and become almost impossible to remove. These images tend to resurface and expand while tempting our minds to pursue such behavior. Studies have concluded that the more people watch television, the lower their self-control, willpower, and ability to withstand any type of temptation become. They are more prone to addictions, creating debt, eating disorders, and being unfaithful in relationships.

By increasing our lust, the media is controlling and manipulating us. In most cases, relationships portrayed in media are dysfunctional with the essential element being sexual attraction. Most of the sexual behavior we see in the media, is not ordinary, it is hyper, manic, and

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obsessive. Pornography portrays the most unhealthy, abnormal, and dysfunctional form of sexuality. It is devoid of any intimacy, trust, care or connection. It encourages domination, exploitation, and violation of another person's body.

Such imagery successfully creates illusions, which captivate people's minds so that they become like primitive hunters seeking for a super sexualized partner. What is the result? People are becoming slaves of their lust, anxiously looking for more and more sexual encounters. People try different partners, situations and genders, but end up feeling frustrated, lonely, and empty.

When we start a relationship based solely on sexual attraction, we are fully aware that our partner might leave us at any time, when they find a more attractive prospect. In order to keep control of our partner we have to enhance our attractiveness by becoming wealthier, powerful or physically beautiful – which requires more hard work and stress.

When we are under the control of our lust, we are pressured to gain more possessions, position, and control. When society is controlled by lust, we experience the rapid spread of sexually transmitted diseases, child prostitution, sexual abuse, incest, and abortions. Freeing ourselves from the media's manipulation and lust's control is essential for our personal and social well-being.

## **Why do we feel attracted to certain people?**

Even when we are in committed relationships, married or decided that we want to be celibate we have all experienced being attracted to another person. We might have also experienced being attracted to our friend's partner, our teacher or someone who is under our care.

## *Awaken Your Spiritual Destiny*

As long as we are alive, we will become attracted to other people, as the desire to express and receive affection is natural. We cannot decide whom we will feel attracted to, but we can decide how we will respond.

It is possible that we can meet someone with whom we had intimate relationships in a past life. In this lifetime when we meet them, they are playing a different role as our boss, or best friend's child. We are not meant to have an intimate romantic relationship again, in this lifetime, and if we do, we will be devolving our consciousness.

It is best if we base our decisions on what is appropriate in this life, not on what might have been in the past. Regardless of how strong our attraction and desires may be, if we fail to follow higher principles, the result for everyone involved will be accumulation of unfavorable *karma*.

If we have a spiritual view of creation, we know that there are always souls who need to be born – and who are looking for parents who can provide the right facilities. These souls do not consider if two people are married or not. These souls are seeking the mother and father that they want. Therefore, they create temptation for individuals to get romantically involved so that they can be born.

At times, we might feel that our attraction to another person is so overwhelming that we are compelled to act. Then it is essential that we redirect that strong energy. We can use the energy to show compassion, love, support, and service to other friends. We can remove ourselves from situations or association, which creates temptation. We can also pray for strength to adhere to our principles and that a soul needing to take birth finds another suitable married couple. Higher spiritual beings are always aware of our struggles and desire to see that we succeed.

## **Watch out for the *Karma* police!**

*The law of karma holds us accountable for each of our actions.*

Our good and bad *karma* resembles two separate bank accounts in which we have previously invested money. The good *karma* we usually choose to withdraw, while the bad *karma* account makes automatic monthly payments to us. We are completely in control of how much we invest in these two accounts – and should remember if we withdraw all the good *karma*, we will get into debt and will need to repay the bank.

Each of us have a certain amount of good *karma* for experiencing romance in a positive way; once we have used it, we might need to wait for another lifetime to accumulate enough *karma* to experience it again. Certain case studies investigating astrological birth charts and marriage have supported this principle.

In India, research was carried out on a group of young women with varied *karma* for romance and marriage. For the first group, researchers selected women with unfavorable *karma* for marriage – their astrological charts revealed negative planetary influences.

These women agreed to follow vows of chastity, spiritual practices, to chant *mantras*, and avoid watching television. For the second group, researchers selected women who had good *karma* for marriage – their astrological charts revealed positive planetary influences. These women were encouraged to follow their desires freely, go on dates, have partners, watch television, and avoid spiritual practices.

After a 15-year period the researchers did a follow up study on the different women's marriages – the women from the first group, the ones who had negative planets in the house of marriage, got married

to good spouses and remained married. Despite their unfavorable *karma* for marriage, their actions changed the influence of the planets and their destinies.

The women from the second group, who had favorable *karma* for marriage, were all either divorced or never succeeded in getting married. The astrological explanation given was that by engaging in romantic relationships before marriage, they had exhausted their romance *karma*. Their actions had weakened the positive influence of Venus, which blesses relationships, and Jupiter which gives moral strength.

How can it be possible that romantic pre-marital relationships change our *karma* to such an extent? It becomes clear when we examine *karmic* principles on a deeper level. Each time we interact with another person, we have a *karmic* exchange. The more intimately we relate to another person, the stronger the *karmic* bond becomes. What is the implication of having a *karmic* bond with another person?

A *karmic* bond means that you start sharing *karma*, from past, present, and future. When we have a physically intimate relationship with a person, we create a strong *karmic* bond for life. We also connect ourselves to all their previous relationships. Each relationship we have tied us to one or several other people's *karma*.

A one-night stand means a lifetime of *karmic* sharing. How does having a *karmic* bond with another person affect us? We will have to experience a part of the others persons struggles, pain, and receive part of reactions for all of their bad actions. All their past, present, and future actions will affect us and complicate our lives.



## **Redirect sexual energy**

*The motivation behind lust is selfish gain, thus the secret in overcoming lust is selfless service*

Considering that our sexual energy is the most powerful energy we possess, it can be a constructive or destructive force – it will depend on our consciousness. As long as we are bereft of a higher purpose and lack deeper meaning and satisfaction in life, we will remain victims of our misdirected sexuality.

The motivation behind lust is selfish gain, thus the secret in overcoming lust is to serve others in a selfless way. To act selflessly we need to choose to restrict our lower tendencies. We need to become more detached from our false ego, selfish desires, and pursuits. To be motivated to overcome the lower self, we need spiritual goals, aspirations, and vision for life.

When we develop a spiritual vision, we see that each person has an intimate connection with the Supreme Person. If we have a partner, we see them as a valuable gift we should treasure. Meditating on how we can serve them will help us transform. Then we will become more mindful, concerned, caring, attentive, generous, aware, and protective towards them. It enables us to express our sexuality through being supportive, compassionate, and creative. This will ensure that we have deep, lasting and satisfying relationships. We will experience that through serving and loving our partner, we are serving the Divine. This is the alchemy of transforming lust into love.

For instance, if we are in a romantic relationship we might find our partner in a foul mood. If we are in low consciousness, we will get angry at their mood, criticize them or decide to leave them alone

until they are in a better mood to entertain us. If we have higher consciousness, we will not judge them, but inquire about the reason for their bad mood. We will listen attentively and ask them how we can support them to deal with the difficulty they are facing.

If we deal with challenges in our relationship this way, we show commitment, support, and concern for our partner. In the majority of cases, this will make our partner value, respect, and trust us more.

## **What is love?**

Why do we fail to experience or give love in profound ways? Why are we confused about where we can find love? When people use the word “love” they often mean “desire”, “need”, “control” or “lust”. In reality, love has nothing to do with the amount of sexual pleasure we can obtain from another person.

Real love is not concerned with personal gain, neither is it a business deal, but rather an exchange between two persons. Love is not a feeling, which is dependent on conditions, circumstances, another person’s actions or words.

Love is an expression of who we are, what we have and what we can share.

Love is a verb; it starts with a decision and results in action to serve another person. It inspires us to share and give more generously than the other.

Real love is Divine, it comes from the Supreme Person, as He is Supreme in all ways, and He is the Supreme Lover and a reservoir of unlimited love. If we desire to experience and share real love, we need to connect with the Supreme Lover.

## **Sex is an expression of love & commitment**

Sex is meant to be an expression of love, commitment, and has immense value. In Bhagavad-Gita, Krishna says, “I am sex life which is not contrary to religious principles.” Thus, at its highest level, sex can fulfill a divine purpose. According to Vedic scriptures, the sacred union of marriage creates the ideal circumstances for sexual union.

Within a marriage, two persons should ideally be fully committed and supportive of each other. Husband and wife should desire the act, consider it divine, and know the highest expression of sexuality is being co-creators of another soul’s destiny. When sex is an expression of love, it can become a great positive energy, which yields many deep spiritual revelations and realizations.

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### **• Principle 2: Truthfulness**

In the Mahabharata, an epic story from ancient India, there are five great heroic brothers, the Pandavas, who were lead by the eldest brother King Yudhishthira. Yudhishthira was the personification of virtue; he was unquestionably truthful, unconditionally dedicated to morality and unequivocally restrained.

When the Pandavas father, King Pandu died, the Pandavas came under the care of their uncle Dhritarastra, whose eldest son was Duryodhana. While the Pandavas were growing up Dhritarastra ruled the kingdom, with the understanding that Yudhishthira was the rightful

heir to the throne. Duryodhana however felt that he should inherit the kingdom. Due to intense envy and greed, Duryodhana had developed a burning desire to humiliate and ultimately destroy the Pandavas.

Duryodhana's uncle, Shakuni also has a deep-seated dislike for Yudhisthira and thus fueled Duryodhana's hatred towards the Pandavas. Shakuni had mystical abilities to manipulate the outcome of any gambling game and suggested to Duryodhana to challenge Yudhisthira to a gambling match. The idea was to cheat and deprive Yudhisthira of all his property and respect.

Duryodhana was thrilled by the idea, and challenged Yudhisthira to a dice game. Yudhisthira being a king stated that he could not refuse any challenge. Yudhisthira's wise uncle Vidura warned Yudhisthira that Duryodhana, due his wicked nature, was surely planning to cheat him, but Yudhisthira could simply not resist the challenge.

King Yudhisthira accompanied with his four brothers, Arjuna, Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva went to the palace of Duryodhana in Hastinapur and met in a great assembly for the dice game. Duryodhana, barely able to constrain himself from laughing at Yudhisthira's imminent downfall, informed Yudhisthira that Shakuni would roll the dice on his behalf.

The first round began and a small amount of gold and jewelry was betted. Inevitably, Yudhisthira lost the game and Duryodhana's evil joy grew. The game progressed and without fail, Shakuni won each round.

As a losing gambler, Yudhisthira began to lose his reason and discrimination. His family members first politely advised and then pleaded him to stop, but he refused to accept defeat, and recklessly continued. Duryodhana ridiculed Yudhisthira shouting, "What type of a king are you, who cannot even win a game of dice? Will you walk

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away from this challenge out of fear?” Yudhisthira became blinded by wrath and placed his kingdom Indraprastha at stake – which he lost at a glance.

Shakuni then challenged him, “You have lost all your gold, possessions, even the clothes which you are wearing! Just accept your defeat and we will allow you to live in Hastinapur as a beggar!”

The words of Shakuni only served to rouse Yudhisthira to continue. The course of the game of dice was making the assembly of men outraged. Yudhisthira had become deaf to their incessant pleas to stop. They were stunned to see that Yudhisthira, the pillar of righteousness had become a hopelessly victim of gambling.

Yudhisthira then placed his brother Bhima up at stake. Bhima was lost and dragged to the feet of Duryodhana who sniggered in utter delight while shouting at Yudhisthira, “I will make your brother my slave! What else can you give me?” Within a few moments, he staked and lost Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva one by one.

Now Yudhisthira was simultaneously fuming with rage and burning with humiliation. Shakuni provoked Yudhisthira “You fool! You have handed us everything on a golden plate. Why don’t you give your worthless self too?” Yudhisthira placed himself at stake and as predestined, he lost himself to Duryodhana. Duryodhana was practically dancing in celebration to see the utter humiliation of Yudhisthira.

To crown his victory he had one more suggestion, “Yudhisthira, you still have your wife, Draupadi, why don’t you bet her too?” Unable to restrain himself from one last desperate attempt at victory, he agreed and placed his Queen at stake. Yudhisthira lost the bet also this time.

Duryodhana sent a servant to fetch Draupadi from her palace and when she refused to come – they dragged her by her hair into

the assembly of men. Draupadi was shocked in utter disbelief to see that her virtuous husband had lost everything in the gambling match. Duryodhana instructed the guards to disrobe the queen in the middle of the assembly of men. Due to his inability to stop gambling Yudhisthira brought great shame over his entire family.

## **What can we learn from this narration about Yudhisthira's great loss?**

Once a person starts with any type of gambling, he very quickly loses his sober judgment and sensibility. Then the tendency is to risk more and more, becoming increasingly reckless.

An illusion of unrealistic optimism controls their minds and makes them believe that they will win. Their greed fuels their desire to win while they are being drawn into a downward spiral.

There is a story of a man who sat depressed outside of his house a few months after the funeral of his father. His friend came by and inquired whether he was mourning due to the death of his father. The man replied, "No, one year ago, my uncle died and left me \$50 000, then six months ago a distant relative passed away and left me \$30 000 and two months ago, my father passed away and left me \$100 000." His friend was perplexed, then asked, "What is the reason for your misery?" The man exclaimed, "Well, no one has died in the past month!" Greed is like an ugly monster; the more you feed it the bigger and uglier it becomes.

Persons pursuing spirituality will benefit more when they work virtuously and depend on the Supreme Person for success. It is clear that gambling is risky, and the chance of succeeding is highly unlikely. Although gambling might seem innocent or like a viable shortcut to success, it is misleading.

## *Higher Principles*

Even when a person gains wealth through gambling, he is not developing his character, skills or experiences. It is another attempt to escape from one's duties and responsibilities. One might be able to fool many people for a long time. However, no one can defeat the law of *karma*.

The law of *karma* is similar to the law of gravity. Whether you believe in it or not, it will pull you down. A person's *karma* requires them to learn certain lessons, go through challenges and do certain work – which when done will enable them to progress spiritually.

We have the option to postpone taking responsibility, learning, and working. Then we are simply postponing our spiritual growth. If we become diligent and responsible towards our work, doing it as our duty, then it becomes part of our personal spiritual development. When we learn to work with a higher consciousness, we become detached from the outcome and results of our work.

A professional business person, who has higher consciousness, will do everything necessary to sell his products. At the same time, he knows that his success will depend on the Supreme Person. If he has high sales, he is grateful and donates some of the profit for a spiritual cause. When his sales are low, he accepts the situation as the result of his own *karma*. He does not become resentful nor does he try to gain through illegal means. As he has realized that, only virtuous acts will bring him good results.

In conclusion, we must resist the temptation that there is a loophole or a short cut somewhere in the middle of our duty. To think, "There is a way to get what I want without having to do what it takes," or to pursue a chance to escape our responsibilities. Even when escapism is not an option, it is risky and dangerous, because we may come to believe that we are independent. That there are no laws governing our desires. Anyhow, we are sure to become entangled while thinking,

“I just have to try a different trick. I just have to guess the right number or pull the right card.” We may go to an extent of hoping to nullify the will of the Supreme by our power or skill, which only leaves us a victim of our illusion.

Ultimately, it is God who is the winner, but His winning is different. Rather than taking something away from us, His winning gives us the greatest treasure; He releases us from the desire to win if winning means that we are separated from our eternal happiness. This is the truth.

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### • **Principle 3: Purity**

There is a story in the Vedas about the sons of the treasurer of the demigods, Kuvera, who were typical spoiled rich children. Nalakuvara and Manigriva grew up surrounded by wealth and were in the habit of pursuing personal pleasure.

One day they were partying with damsels from the heavenly planets in celestial gardens. They decided to go swim naked in divine water pools with the women.

Narada Muni, a sage who travels all over the universe to spread the culture of bhakti, happened to pass by. The women were immediately shameful for their frivolous behavior, covered their bodies, and hid from Narada. Nalakuvara and Manigriva were so intoxicated that they simply did not care, but instead got up and danced around naked in a mocking way to ‘shock’ Narada Muni. He looked at the young men and said, “So you want to expose your naked bodies to all the elements? You clearly desire to live without clothes. I curse you two to



## *Higher Principles*

become trees!” The two brothers lost their sense of proper behavior due to intoxication. Resultantly they went from living a most opulent life to being trees on earth.

Our bodies are precious gifts, which we should utilize for our spiritual journey. Being aware of the spark of Supreme Consciousness in us, we should see our bodies as temples. A temple is a place of worship, prayer, meditation, and transformation. Intoxication makes us lose contact with our personal values, aspirations, and boundaries, thus it violates the sacredness of our bodies.

Furthermore, it affects a person’s physical and subtle body immensely. Depending on the type of intoxication a person uses, there can be side effects of damage to the brain, nervous system, internal organs, and glands. Intoxication is also associated with mood disorders as depression, anxiety and bipolar disorder, thought disorders like schizophrenia, as well as personality disorders like antisocial personality disorder.

Why do so many people intoxicate their bodies and minds in some or the other way? They are in search for an escape route; the motivation of many people is to find relief from stress, hardship, and pain. Others might be seeking alternative experiences desiring to move into higher realms of existence. Can we achieve spiritual enlightenment by artificially altering our state of consciousness? If we use intoxications we will definitely have an extraordinary experience. We might feel that we come to higher insights, feel more connected to spiritual energies or see other realms. Can we really make concrete spiritual advancement this way?

Seeing a tree rocking backwards and forwards, we can conclude that a strong wind is blowing. If we see a person is vigorously pushing the tree and the tree is moving, we cannot conclude that the wind is blowing. Similarly, a drug-induced experience might seem just like a

spiritual encounter and it might make us aware of higher dimensions, but will not enable us to enter. People who take intoxications may have symptoms or visions, which are associated with spiritual encounters, but these are like artificial flowers. They might seem real and look beautiful – but they remain a fake.

Why do we buy artificial flowers? We desire to create the impression that we have flowers, but real flowers need to be continuously replaced, so we choose the cheaper option and buy fake ones. Likewise, when we try to evolve through intoxication, we are going for the cheaper option. What does this reveal about our attitude towards spirituality? Are we convinced that spiritual enlightenment is so cheap that we can buy a drug to achieve it?

Spiritual growth requires dedication, sacrifice and commitment to evolve oneself through spiritual practices. Our tendency to pursue personal pleasure is the essence of the cause of our spiritual devolution. Taking intoxication is another way, which we are trying to bring more pleasure to ourselves. We are strengthening our false ego, as we are reinforcing a self-satisfying attitude. On the contrary, the essence of spiritual practices is to serve and bring pleasure to God. A genuine spiritual path requires that we overcome the false ego by developing a service attitude.

Any type of intoxication weakens our subtle body by destroying *prana* (vitality), lowering the vibration of our aura and creating imbalances in chakras. A weakened subtle body makes a person more susceptible to all negative subtle influences. Subtle entities as ghosts can then easily enter our body and possess our mind. Therefore, intoxication has actually stagnated or digressed your spiritual transformation.

If we ground ourselves in practices as meditation, *yoga* and studying scriptures, we will gradually evolve to higher consciousness. Intoxi-

cation might seem like a short cut on your spiritual journey. Nevertheless, it is not. It is a path on which you may have gotten lost, failing to ever reach the desired spiritual destination.

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### • **Principle 4: Compassion**

Once the sage Narada Muni was on pilgrimage to Prayag when he entered a forest and found a deer pierced by arrows, writhing in pain, its legs broken. Narada Muni felt disturbed by the viciousness with which the little animal had been attacked. He tried to remove the arrows, but the deer was clearly going to die a painful death. As Narada continued moving through the forest, he found a rabbit that was similarly wounded. Determined to find the cruel culprit, he moved through the forest searching until he noticed a hunter – who was aiming his arrow to injure another animal.

Narada Muni rushed towards the hunter purposefully creating noise so that the innocent animal would flee. The hunter, Mrigari, turned around in a fit of anger and aggressively shouted at Narada.

Narada remained peaceful and composed while approaching Mrigari. Mrigari was taken aback by Narada's graceful demeanour and asked him "Why are you interfering with my hunting?" Narada replied with a question to Mrigari "Why you are half killing the animals to make them suffer a slow death?"

Mrigari nonchalantly replied, "Isn't it obvious to you that I am a professional hunter? This is my family tradition, our culture and way of life. My father taught me to injure the animals and watch them die slowly. Seeing them being helpless, fearful and at my mercy, brings me great pleasure."

## *Awaken Your Spiritual Destiny*

Narada responded, “You may be a hunter by profession, but why do you inflict more unnecessary pain on animals? Don’t you think that your cruel actions are bringing some form of suffering in your life?”

Mrigari simply laughed maliciously and said, “This is how I was brought up, this is who I am, and I am not going to become a sentimental saint.”

Being a mystical person Narada had extraordinary powers to reveal a person’s destiny to them. At once, he showed Mrigari the reality he would need to face. All the hundreds of animals he had killed had turned into ghosts coming towards him for bloody revenge. Each animal was entitled to inflict the pain they had experienced with him, but Mrigari would not die, he would just receive more torture.

Screaming due to anguishing pain and fear, Mrigari pleaded with Narada to end the nightmare. Narada immediately ended the experience and Mrigari was left traumatized. What would our reaction be if we realized we have to be accountable for any pain we caused to the animals? If we desire to have peaceful lives, we need to transform our thoughts, words, and actions to express compassion. People with higher consciousness understand that we are interconnected with the entire universe and express compassion towards the environment, plants, animals and people.

One simple but powerful way in which we can express compassion is through choosing a vegetarian or vegan diet. As human beings, we have a responsibility towards each other, mother Bhumi (the earth), and all living beings to act as guardians. When we fail to take on this responsibility and instead exploit the earth and animals, we seriously hamper our individual and collective spiritual growth.

The Vedas teach us that animals have souls and that their lives should be valued. When we eat meat, we take an entire life of another soul, simply to satisfy our own desires for one meal.

## *Higher Principles*

Does this action express compassion? Unless a person finds himself in a situation where there is no other food source than meat, eating meat is highly selfish. The underlying mentality when we eat meat is 'my short pleasure, is more important than other beings entire lives'. What type of *karma* will such attitude and behavior bring a person?

Meat eating also directly affects a person's current state of mind. When slaughtered, animals are in fear and anxiety, while those who slaughter them act with aggression and cruelty. All these emotions will be present in the meat in form of subtle energy.

When persons are consuming meat, they are consuming immense negative energy. Consequently, as long as we indirectly engage in acts of violence by eating meat, we will not be able to experience a true peaceful state of mind. In addition, when we support the meat industry, we are also contributing to the destruction of the environment, causing great pain to mother Bhumi. As environmental science has advanced, it has become apparent that the meat industry is a driving force behind virtually every major environmental devastation now threatening the human future – deforestation, erosion, fresh water scarcity, air and water pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss, and the spread of disease.

Hundreds of thousands of acres of tropical forests in Brazil, Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Honduras have been leveled to create pasture for cattle – mostly to produce beef for burgers in USA. Since burning has cleared most of the forest, the extension of cattle pasture also creates carbon dioxide, which contributes significantly to global warming.

The meat industry also uses shocking amounts of water. Currently half the water consumed in the U.S. is used to grow grain for cattle feed. The standard diet of person eating meat requires 16,000 liters

of water per day (for animals' drinking water, irrigation of crops, processing, washing, cooking, etc.). A person on a vegan diet requires only 1150 liters a day.

A report from the International Water Management Institute states that 840 million of the world's people remain undernourished and recommends finding ways to produce more food using less water. The report notes that it takes 550 liters of water to produce enough flour for one loaf of bread in developing countries... but up to 7,000 liters of water to produce 100 grams of beef. (UN Commission on Sustainable Development, "Water – More Nutrition Per Drop," 2004)

Giant livestock farms, which can house hundreds of thousands of pigs, chickens or cows, produce vast amounts of waste. In fact, in the United States, these 'factory farms' generate more than 130 times the amount of waste than people do. (Natural Resources Defense Council)

Global warming is driven by energy consumption, to the extent that the principal energy sources are carbon-rich fuels that, when burned, emit carbon dioxide or other planet-blanketing gases. Meat production produces more greenhouse gas emissions than transportation, with direct emissions from meat production accounting for some 18% of the world's emission. (This includes emissions generated from clearing forests and land, making and transporting fertilizer, burning fossil fuels in farm vehicles, and the front and rear end emissions from cattle and sheep). Producing a pound of grain-fed beef requires a gallon of gasoline. Major environmental groups thus heavily criticize junk-food chains such as KFC and McDonalds.

While hunger and malnutrition remains a problem in underdeveloped countries, one third of the world's grains are being fed to live stock. In the United States 70 to 80% of grain produced is used by the meat industry. This amount of grains is so vast that it could feed 800 million people.

## *Higher Principles*

The World Hunger Program at Brown University calculated that recent world harvests, if equitably distributed with no diversion of grain to feeding livestock, could provide a vegetarian diet to 6 billion people, whereas a meat-rich diet like that of people in the wealthier nations could support only 2.6 billion

Meat is also costing the planet much more than we realize. Researchers in India did some calculations to determine the environmental costs that are part of the production of a \$4 hamburger. If the burger is produced on land that once used to be rainforest, then there is the loss of the rainforest, the eco-system, the carbon and biodiversity. When we calculate all the environmental costs, it turns out that the price of a hamburger should be near \$200!

Thus it becomes clear that meat, especially beef is inefficient as a source of food. By the time beef cattle in the United States are ready for slaughter, it has consumed 1225 kg of grain and weighs approximately 477 kg; thus 157 million metric tons of cereal and vegetable protein is used to produce 28 metric tons of animal protein.

Another problem that the meat industry creates is the rapid spreading of infectious diseases. Globalization has vastly increased the mobility of all diseases and one consequence is that outbreaks, which in past centuries might have been contained within a single village, now can quickly spread around the globe. When a case of mad cow disease was detected in the United States in 2004, it was discovered that parts of that single cow had been distributed to about a dozen different states.

Medical research has clearly established a correlation between a meat-based diet and increased risk for cardiovascular disease, colon cancer, breast cancer, and osteoporosis. Not only is mortality from coronary heart disease lower in vegetarians than in non-vegetarians,

but vegetarian diets have also been successful in arresting coronary heart disease. Scientific data suggests positive relationships between a vegetarian diet and reduced risk for obesity, coronary artery disease, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, and some types of cancer.

Human beings have a unique role to play on earth, which is to raise our personal and collective consciousness to its highest level. The human mind and body enables one to reach enlightenment as we re-establish our connection with Divine consciousness.

If we want to fulfil our destiny, we need to become caretakers of all living entities expressing endless love, concern and compassion. If we make the compassionate choice to follow a vegetarian or vegan diet you not only change your destiny, but also that of unlimited other living beings.

As long as we make decisions solely for our own pleasure, we are empowering our false ego, degrading our consciousness and failing to fulfil our destiny. When we understand that the earth is sacred and that all living beings share the same spiritual origin, we will be inspired to take up our role as stewards. When we do so, we are fulfilling our dharma, our destiny, which will ensure our personal and collective spiritual advancement.

## **A plea to the mind**

Dear Mind, there is no pleasure in eating the flesh of animals;  
there is so much good food that nature has given us.

I do not need to sacrifice my good karma for  
the sake of pleasing my tongue for a minute.

My dear mind, just open your eyes and look  
around the world, look at the chaos created due to not  
understanding that even animals have souls.

You can make a difference by choosing a compassionate diet.



## **Prayer to the Lord**

Dear Lord,  
give me the compassion and  
ability to control my desires.  
May I not be an instrument or reason  
for another living entity to be killed.  
Due to my conditioning for lifetimes,  
I have become resistant to seeing reality.  
Help me to progress in my life and  
to become a caretaker of the creation.  
Let me contribute to world peace  
and not towards war.

## **Perfection of compassionate cooking**

Our karma causes every single problem we experience in life. Any food we eat contains new *karma*! As long as we continue to accumulate more *karma*, it will prevent us from fully developing our spiritual identity. Our current *karma* is a result of our past thoughts, words, desires, and actions. Our current thoughts, words, desires, and actions will determine our future *karma*.

A popular saying in the health industry is, ‘You are what you eat’, which is meant to inspire people to eat healthy foods so they will be prosperous. If we take the law of *karma* into consideration, then the truth is that, “What you eat will change your destiny!”

Even to produce vegetarian food, one must still harm other living entities in the process of obtaining and preparing it. The farmer may kill insects during the cultivation of crops and the plants are harmed when they are uprooted, pruned or cut. There is also a saying: “If your wife is angry, don’t eat at home.” People intuitively know that

the consciousness in which we cook affects the food we make. From a *karmic* point of view, each person who has dealt with your food, the person who grew it, harvested, transported, packed, sold, cooked and served it – all add some energy and *karma* to your meal!

Even if you eat a vegan or fruitarian diet, there is no escaping from some *karma* and some negative energy. There is a way to avoid receiving more bad *karma* each time we eat? Can food become completely *karma* free?

If you are willing to follow a vegetarian diet, you can now sigh with relief. The Supreme Person desires that we transcend our *karma* and become fully aware our spiritual identity. Thus, he provides us with ways in which we can spiritualize every aspect of our lives - including our diet.

We can spiritualize every aspect of our lives by acknowledging that God provides us with everything we have, including our resources, abilities, and relationships. We can express our gratitude towards God by offering everything we cook to Him. Bhagavad-Gita says that when person first offers their food to God, all the accumulated karma in the food is replaced by spiritual energy.

We could cook with higher motivation, seeing cooking as a meditation, an opportunity to prepare food with care, love, and devotion. To facilitate cooking in a higher consciousness we can have the kitchen as clean as possible and have spiritual music to spiritualize the atmosphere.

After cooking in this higher consciousness, we can sincerely offer it to the Supreme Person, with love. Any vegetarian preparation we offer He will accept – as long as we offer it with love and devotion.

In Bhagavad-Gita 9.26 Krishna says: “If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, fruit or water, I will accept it.”

## *Higher Principles*

The Supreme Person is the source of everything. He does not require our food, but He is hankering to see us express our love. A parent would appreciate receiving a simple dessert made by their young child, not because they're dependent on the child, but because the child's act is an expression of love. Equally the Supreme Person appreciates us offering fruits, grains and vegetarian foods, as an exchange of love. His sole interest is seeing if we have sincere motivations for offering Him food. He does not accept foods like meat, fish or eggs, because those foods can only be obtained by harming other living beings.

When we sincerely offer food, asking for His blessings and mercy, the Supreme Person removes all the accumulated karma from the food. When we cook food with care and love, that energy will enter into the food. Then when we offer it, the Supreme person accepts that love and as reciprocation, He spiritualizes the food with His divine love. This spiritualized food called *prasada* (mercy).

By eating this spiritualized food, we avoid accumulating unfavorable *karma* and provide our bodies and minds with spiritual energy. In this way, we gradually become free from all *karma* and our spiritual nature becomes revealed.

As we bring spiritual practices into our lives, we bring spirituality to several other living beings. When we offer food, the farmer, the shop, and even the plants, which produced the food, all partake in the blessing, as they have contributed to the offering. When we share and distribute *prasada*, even more people are connected with the spiritual energy. Thus, cooking, eating and sharing *prasada* is a means through which we can spread divine love.

Therefore, the *Bhakti* scriptures conclude that preparing *prasada* is the perfection of compassionate cooking.

## **Sacred Mantras for offering**

Below are the *mantras* for offering food to the Supreme Lord. As offering food is an act of love, we offer it to the form of the Supreme, which exhibits the most love, which is Krishna. Krishna means the one who can attract everyone's heart, and thus He is the manifestation of Divine love. One can offer the food to a picture of Krishna, in special small bowls only used for this purpose.

First, we acknowledge and ask blessing from a real *guru* of the *Bhakti-yoga* tradition, as A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. This practice is an expression of gratitude towards the *guru* who has shared and spread the teachings of *Bhakti-yoga*. Then we glorify the *yuga-avatar* (the *avatar* of this age) Caitanya Mahaprabhu – the effulgent dancing *avatar*. Finally we glorify the Supreme Person in his manifestation as Krishna. By repeating these *mantras* in a prayerful mood, we are invoking their presence so we can exchange our offering for their blessings.

### **1. Prayers to Srila Prabhupada:**

*nama om visnu-padaya krsna-presthaya bhutale  
srimate bhaktivedanta-swamin iti namine  
namas te sarasvate deve gaura-vani-pracarine  
nirviseva sunyavadi pascyatya desa tarine*

“I offer my respectful obeisances unto His Divine Grace  
A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada, who is very dear to  
Lord Krishna, having taken shelter at His lotus feet.  
Our respectful obeisances are unto you, O spiritual master, servant of  
Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Gosvami.

## *Higher Principles*

You are kindly preaching the message of Lord Caitanya Deva and delivering the Western countries, which are filled with impersonalism and voidism.”

### **2. Prayer to Lord Caitanya:**

*namo maha-vadanyaya krsna-prema-pradaya te  
krsnaya krsna-caitanya-namne gaura-tvise namah*

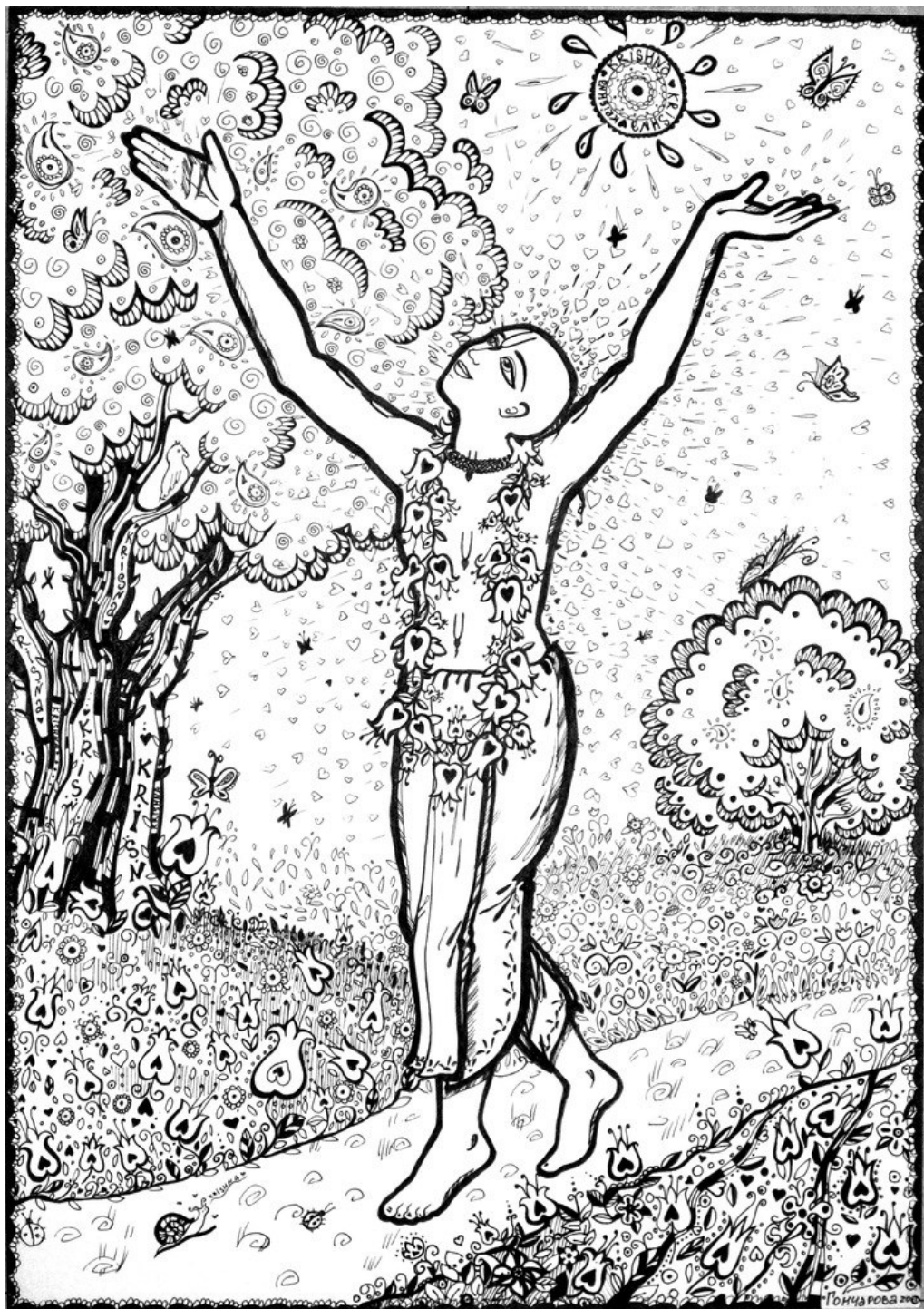
“O most munificent incarnation! You are Krishna Himself appearing as Sri Krishna Caitanya Mahaprabhu. You have assumed the golden color of Srimati Radharani and You are widely distributing pure love of Krishna. We offer our respectful obeisances unto You.”

### **3. Prayer to the Supreme Person, Krishna:**

*namo brahmanya-devaya go-brahmana-hitaya ca  
jagad-dhitaya krsnaya govindaya namo namah*

“I offer my respectful obeisances unto Lord Krishna, who is the worshipable Deity for all brahmanas, the well-wisher of the cows and the *brahmanas* and the benefactor of the whole world. I offer my repeated obeisances to the Personality of Godhead, known as Krishna and Govinda.”

After offering the food to the Lord, we wait some minutes for Him to receive the preparations. Then we can transfer the food from Krishna’s plate back into the cooking pots. It is ideal to first wash the offering plates, and then serve the spiritualized food, *prasada*.



# Sanctify your subtle body

**W**e can understand our subtle bodies as an energy field, created through our thoughts, desires, and actions. As the physical body has a circulation system which transports our blood through the major parts and organs, the subtle body is also composed of a different energy circulation system, which moves energy through major energy centers, the *chakras*. Each of our organs has specific and important functions. Similar, each of the *chakras* has specific physiological and psychological functions.

The *chakras* are aligned in an ascending column from the base of the spine to the top of the head. Each *chakra* is associated with a certain color lotus with a different number of petals in each *chakra*. There are seven major and twenty one minor *chakras*. They are the location of life energy or *prana*, which flows along pathways called *nadis*. The function of the *chakras* is to spin and draw in the *prana* energy to keep the spiritual, mental, emotional and physical health of the body in balance.

The *chakras* vitalize the physical body and are associated with the interactions of our physical, emotional and mental nature. We can keep the energy flow in our *chakras* balanced if our emotional, mental,

physical and spiritual aspirations are integrated. If the *prana* becomes stagnant, it results in an energy blockage, which causes an imbalance in a *chakra*. For instance, when there is an energy blockage in the heart *chakra*, one will lose touch with their emotions and be unable to connect with their feelings. If one has a blockage in the throat *chakra* one will be unable to express oneself through speaking.

There are many ways to balance *chakras* and keep our subtle bodies strengthened. Spiritual practitioners are concerned with these practices as sanctifying our subtle bodies helps us to connect with Divine energy.

When we have several imbalances in our *chakras*, we will struggle to meditate, feel a lack of centeredness and our minds and emotions will disturb us too much for us to focus on our spiritual development.

In my studies of Reiki, *Pranic* healing, Crystal healing and *Vipassana* I learned several practices to keep the *chakras* balanced. After practicing several methods, my personal experience was that the most powerful way to protect and energize the subtle body is by applying *gopi chandan* (sacred clay) as *tilak* (divine marking) with the chanting of *mantras* and wearing sacred *Tulasi* beads.

## ***Gopi Chandan* – The mystery of sacred clay**

*Gopi chandan* is clay from the sacred soil of different holy places in India such as Vrindavana and Dvaraka. When the Divine descends to the earth, He manifests all his transcendental qualities. One of His qualities is that His body is similar to touchstone. Therefore, everything He meets is transformed with spiritual potency. The soil of the places where the Supreme divinity lived was touched by His feet and thereby transformed into the sacred soil. One such place is the holy town of



## *Sanctify your subtle body*

Vrindavana. In Vrindavana, the Supreme descended in His original form, Krishna, and His eternal associates the Gopis joined Him. The Gopis are the highest evolved divine female companions of the Supreme Person. When they descend on earth, their sole mission is to serve and entertain Krishna through dancing, singing and musical performances. They have many secret divine pastimes with Krishna in the forest of Vrindavana. As they moved through the forest, on a certain occasion some of their cosmetics fell onto the earth. At these specific places, their cosmetics mixed with the earth and the soil transformed into golden colored *gopi chandan* – which Vedic scriptures considered as sacred clay.

One might doubt the truth about the potency of the holy places and ‘holy clay’. At the same time, we know that our state of consciousness determines our perception of reality. In order to perceive spiritual energy, we need to have pure consciousness devoid of the influence of our false ego.

Studies have concluded that plants exposed to classical music grow significantly better than their counterparts exposed to hard-core metal. The plants are conscious beings, but are not evolved enough to express appreciation for the music. However, the plants still derived benefit from it. If a music student listened to the same music he could explain in detail, what musical elements made the music a classical masterpiece. The music student’s experience with the music is more profound due to his more evolved state of consciousness.

Similarly, sacred objects and places will affect any person who encounters it, but the individual’s experience will vary on the level of their consciousness. As a person follows spiritual practices and visits sacred places, their experiences and realizations deepen. Placing *Gopi chandan* as *tilak* on the body is a sacred act of acknowledging the Supreme Person’s divine presence in our hearts.

*Tilak* is applied in a certain form (see picture), which is also placed on all temples of Vishnu in India. Marking the body, this way also reminds us, that our body is a temple of the *Jiva-atma*, the spirit soul and Paramatma, the Supreme Soul. When we start seeing our body as a sacred temple, it will inspire us to use the body for higher purposes. *Tilak* markings are like a temporary tattoo that reads 'This body is a sacred temple of the Divine'.

The process of marking the body with *tilak* purifies one's *chakras* and sanctifies the body, opening our psyche to unlimited growth and happiness.

When we chant *mantras* as we apply *tilak*, the *mantras* seal the *chakras* - thus creating a powerful barrier for our subtle body.

Wearing *tilak* protects a person from all forms of negative energy, as disembodied beings, evil influences, nightmares and accidents.

The practice of applying *tilak* has been part of spiritual practice in India since time immemorial. Spiritual practitioners ranging from monks and priests to kings and ministers all adhered to this practice. For persons living in modern society, the idea of putting clay on your body might seem a bit primitive or tribal.



## *Sanctify your subtle body*

Maybe it sounds appropriate for a dress up party. However, painting on our bodies is actually more common than we think. Sport fans and cheerleaders often paint their faces and bodies with their team names. Many women have a variety of colors on their eyes, lips, eyelashes and cheeks. Some even get permanent make up tattooed on their faces.

We can conclude that what type of markings on our bodies, we perceive as 'strange' is mostly due to our cultural upbringing. In India, followers of various spiritual paths wear marks on the foreheads indicating their faith. If more people in other parts of the world start to follow this practice, it will in time become socially and culturally accepted as normal.

If a person does however not feel comfortable wearing *tilak* with the full markings in public, he can instead apply a small dot of *tilak* at the twelve designated places. Alternatively, one may also chant the appropriate *mantra* and apply 'water *tilak*'.

## *Tilak mantras*

*One who chants the holy names of Lord Hari,  
wears tilak on his forehead and kantimala  
(tulasi beads) around his neck is eligible to go  
to the Spiritual Realm.*

One can mark twelve parts of his body, correlating with chakras, with *tilak*. The areas marked are above the waist: forehead, stomach, chest, throat, right waist, right arm, right shoulder, left waist, left arm, left shoulder, upper back and lower back.

If one marks the body with *tilak* while reciting the specific *mantras* composed of the names of the Supreme Person one's mind and the sacred sound vibration further strengthens the subtle body.

Below is a picture, which illustrates how *tilak* is applied.



- 1) *om kesavaya namah* – forehead
- 2) *om narayanaya namah* – navel
- 3) *om madhavaya namah* – chest
- 4) *om govindaya namah* – hollow of the neck
- 5) *om visnave namah* – right abdomen
- 6) *om madhusudanaya namah* – right arm
- 7) *om trivikramaya namah* – right shoulder
- 8) *om vamanaya namah* – left abdomen
- 9) *om sridharaya namah* – left arm
- 10) *om hrsikesaya namah* – left shoulder
- 11) *om padmanabhaya namah* – upper back
- 12) *om damodaraya namah* – lower back

Persons who follow the practices of wearing *tilak* have experienced how they connect with divine energy and become fearless and confident. One example is of a friend who is a professional businessman who works for a consulting company. He was convinced that wearing

## *Sanctify your subtle body*

*tilak* would empower, protect him, and thus wore it every day to work. Initially his co-workers found his unusual practices amusing and ridiculed it. The man was steady in his conviction and practices. Over time, his co-workers noticed that he was more confident, sufficient and secure than any of them. He also gained the respect of the seniors and could respectfully voice his opinion to their employee. The co-workers became curious and asked him how he had become the most successful. He was completely convinced that his secret was – wearing *tilak*.

## **Story of King Dirghabahu and Gopi Chandan**

*“A person who marks his limbs with gopi candan tilak attains the result of bathing in the Ganga. A person who daily wears gopi candan tilak attains the pious result of daily bathing in all the sacred rivers. He attains the result of giving charity and following vows at all holy places. He attains the goal of life. Of this there is no doubt.”*

In Sindhu-Desa (a part of ancient India) there was a king named Dirghabahu. He was cruel and addicted to visiting prostitutes. During his life, he murdered a hundred *brahmanas* (religious teachers) and ten pregnant women.

One day he mounted a *sindhu* horse to go hunting. Unknown to the Dirghabahu, one of his ministers, who was greedy to obtain the kingdom, had followed him. Upon seeing a big brown animal, the king released a range of arrows at it. To the king's disappointment he realized that it had been a brown cow. At that moment, while he was off guard, the inimical minister attacked and killed the king.

Seeing Dirghabahu dead on the ground the *yamadutas* (workers from the realm of death) came and bound him, and took him to the city of Yamaraja (the Lord of the realm of death). Seeing the malevolent king brought before him, Yamaraja asked his scribe Chitragupta: “What is the proper punishment for him?”

Sri Chitragupta said, “O great king, he should be thrown into eight million four hundred thousand hells for as long as the sun and the moon shine in the sky. On the earth, he did not perform a single pious deed. He killed ten pregnant women. He killed a brown cow. He killed thousands of deer in the forest. He offended the demigods and the *brahmanas*. He is a great sinner.”

Then, by Yamaraja’s order, the *yamadutas* took Dirghabahu and threw him into a terrible, eight thousand mile wide cauldron of bubbling boiling oil in the hell of Kumbhipaka. The moment the king came to it, the boiling oil, which was as hot as the great fires at the time of cosmic devastation, suddenly became cool.

The *yamadutas* were perplexed and asked Yamaraja to solve the case. Yamaraja and Chitragupta carefully reviewed the king’s case and concluded that he had not performed a single pious deed. Then Vyasadeva (the author of the Vedas) arrived in the assembly.

Bowing down before Him, Yamaraja asked Vyasadeva: “When this King Dirghabahu, who had never performed even a single pious deed, was thrown into the terrible boiling oil of Kumbhipaka, the oil suddenly became cool. Because of this, my mind is now tortured with doubts.”

Sri Vyasadeva replied: “Yamaraja, the intelligent sages, who have studied all the scriptures, know that the ways of piety, sin, and spiritual progress are very subtle and difficult to understand. Somehow or other, by destiny, this sinner did perform a pious deed, and by that deed he became purified. The King died in a place where from

## *Sanctify your subtle body*

someone's hands *gopi-candan* from Dwaraka had accidentally fallen. Dying in *gopi-candan*, that sinner became purified.”

Hearing this, Yamaraja took the King and placed him on an airplane to Vaikuntha (the spiritual realm).

## ***Tulasi* - Sacred wood**

India is famous for its many holy pilgrimage places. Practitioners of *Bhakti-yogi* consider the town of Vrindavana to be the most sacred. The name Vrindavana means forest of Vrinda Devi. Vrinda Devi is a divine personality who created the Vrindavana forest for Krishna's past times with his devotees.

The sacred *Tulasi* plant (Holy basil) is a manifestation of Vrinda Devi. In India, people consider *Tulasi* devi as the most sacred plant as has numerous medicinal and spiritual qualities. *Tulasi* leaves are used in numerous religious ceremonies. *Japa mala* (meditation beads) and *kanti mala* (neck beads), which various spiritual practitioners throughout India use, is also made out of *Tulasi* wood. *Bhakti* scriptures state that the divine presence of *Tulasi* is within the wood.

When a person wears *kanti mala*, Vrinda Devi blesses and protects him. The *Bhakti* scriptures state that *Tulasi* Devi calms and purifies the mind and shields it from negative energy.

Furthermore, it balances the *prana*, clears the aura and especially influences and opens the heart *chakra* to sensations of the divine love.





# Fasting according to lunar calendar

*“Know it for certain that the vow of Ekadasi is the highest of all”.*

-Gopis of Vrindavana

Civilizations all over the world have noticed that the moon’s phases have a profound impact on earth. For instance, wine makers have used the lunar calendar for centuries to determine when they should harvest, press and bottle their wine. Each phase of the moon has a specific influence on our minds.

The dark moon radiates a deep lonely contemplative energy. The full moon night has a nourishing, soothing and compassionate energy. Astrologers say that if you want a person to fall in love with you, you should take them for a walk under the full moon.

Ancient Vedic culture used the moon calendar to calculate auspicious days to perform sacred ceremonies and festivals. Following a fasting *vrata* (vow) is a spiritual practice that strengthens the mind. Our minds are often preoccupied with thoughts related to food. When we fast, we learn to resist our mind’s desire, which builds mental strength and control. Mental strength and control enables us to channel our mental energy to connect to higher spiritual truths and experiences.

Following a *vrata* might seem like a foreign practice. We have all experienced that we have a dual nature – a higher and a lower self. In order to reach our full potential we need to strengthen the higher self. Any athlete who has made it to the Olympics could not rely only on their natural abilities. They had followed a strict training regime, and that required them to make sacrifices.

Likewise, no one has achieved self-realization simply by talking about being ‘spiritual’. Any authentic spiritual path requires that we follow *sadhana*, spiritual practices, and that we are willing to make some sacrifices.

Real spiritual development requires commitment to engage in a battle with the lower self, and let the higher self become victorious. A *vrata* is a sincere promise to perform a specific act or behave in a certain manner, which requires some sacrifice and limits our sensory enjoyment. Following a *vrata* disciplines and regulates the mind. It is like a training program for an athlete; it creates strength and improves performance.

When a student needs to study for an exam he may take a vow that he will study 4 hours each morning and only thereafter take a lunch break. Initially his mind might rebel at the rigid schedule and demand a snack break. If the student has determination to stick to his vow, he will find that over time his mind accepts the new boundaries. He will be able to be focused and productive during his studying hours and then peacefully take a break when he knows he deserves it.

According to the Vedic lunar calendar, one day that is ideal for following for fasting is *Ekadasi*, which is on the 11th day after the waning and waxing moon. We can start to fast on *Ekadasi* in a gradual way. The goal of fasting is to remove our minds focus from a primary ‘desire to eat’ to spiritual practices as meditation and prayer. When fasting, we should try withdrawing all our energy from external activi-

## *Fasting according to lunar calendar*

ties such as watching TV, playing games and interacting through social media. On *Ekadasi*, we should ideally take out time for introspection, contemplation, meditation and prayer.

My grandmother, Sharada, has been fasting on each *Ekadasi* since her early childhood. Despite having numerous challenges, including living with an impossible psychopathic mother in law for more than 60 years and unsupportive husband, she always remained positive, spiritually enlivened and successful. As I grew up, Sharada would remind me of the immense strength which she derived from fasting on *Ekadasi*. She is convinced that this and other spiritual practices saved her from depression and instead made her transcend the various difficulties.

There are different ways which one can fast on *Ekadasi*:

- We can refrain from eating all grains, beans and legumes and eat fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, milk, and grain replacers such as buckwheat, Samoa rice and quinoa.
- We can fast till midday and then take a meal consisting of ingredients listed above
- We can eat only fruits and drinking water.
- We can drink only liquids such as milk, juice, coconut water and water.
- We can drink only water
- We can dry fast, neither eating nor drinking anything  
(*Nirjala* fasting)

# Appendix

## **The Story of *Ekadasi***

Once the great sage Jaimini Rishi said to his spiritual master, “O Gurudeva! Previously, by your mercy, you described to me the history of the Ganga River, the benefits of worshiping Vishnu, the giving of grains in charity, the giving of water in charity... O best of sages, Sri Gurudeva, now, with great enthusiasm, I desire to hear about the benefits of fasting on *Ekadasi* and of the appearance of *Ekadasi*.”

“O Gurudeva! When did *Ekadasi* take birth and from whom did she appear? What are the rules of fasting on the day of *Ekadasi*? Please describe the benefits of following this vow and when it should be followed. Who is the utmost worshipable presiding deity of Sri *Ekadasi*? What are the faults in not observing *Ekadasi* properly? Please bestow your mercy upon me and tell about these subjects, as you are the only person able to do so.”

Srila Vyasadeva, upon hearing this inquiry from Jaimini Rishi, became situated in transcendental bliss. “O *brahmana* sage Jaimini! The results of following *Ekadasi* can be perfectly described by the Supreme Lord, Narayana, because Sri Narayana is the only personality capable of describing them in full. But I will give a very brief description in answer to your question.”

## *The story of Ekadasi*

At the beginning of the material creation, the Supreme Lord created the moving and non-moving living entities within this world made of five gross material elements. Simultaneously, for punishing the immoral human beings, He created a personality whose form was the embodiment of the worst kinds of bad *karma* (*Papa-purusha*). The different limbs of this personality were constructed of various degrading activities.

His head was made of the bad *karma* of murdering a *brahmana*, his two eyes were the form of drinking intoxicants, his mouth was made from the bad *karma* of stealing gold, his ears were the form of the bad *karma* of having illicit connection with the spiritual master's wife, his nose was of the bad *karma* of killing one's wife, his arms the form of the bad *karma* of killing a cow, his neck was made of the bad *karma* of stealing accumulated wealth, his chest of the bad *karma* of abortion, his lower chest of the bad *karma* of having sex with another's wife, his stomach of the bad *karma* of killings one's relatives, his navel of the bad *karma* of killing those who are dependent on him, his waist of the bad *karma* of egotistical self-appraisal, his thighs of the bad *karma* of offending the *guru*, his genitals of the bad *karma* of selling one's daughter, his buttocks of the bad *karma* of telling confidential matters, his feet of the bad *karma* of killing one's father, and his hair was the form of all sorts of less severe degrading activities. In this way, a horrible personality embodying all degrading activities and vices was created. His body color is black, and his eyes are yellow. He inflicts extreme misery upon degraded persons.

The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Vishnu, upon seeing this personality of bad *karma* began to think to Himself as follows: "I am the creator of miseries and happiness for the living entities. I am their master because I have created this personality of bad *karma*, who gives distress to all dishonest, deceitful, and degraded persons.

Now I must create someone who will control this personality.”

At this time, the Supreme Lord created the personality of Yamaraja and the different lower planetary systems meant for correctional purposes. Those living entities who are filled with bad *karma* will be sent after death to Yamaraja, who will in turn, according to their bad karma, send them to an appropriate correctional region to learn lessons a hard way.

After these adjustments had been made, the Supreme Lord, who is the giver of distress and happiness to the living entities, went to the house of Yamaraja, with the help of Garuda, the king of birds. When Yamaraja saw that Lord Vishnu had arrived, he immediately washed His feet and made an offering unto Him. He then had Him sit upon a golden throne. The Supreme Lord Vishnu became seated upon the throne, whereupon He heard very loud crying sounds from the southern direction. He became surprised by this and inquired of Yamaraja, “From where is this loud crying coming?”

Yamaraja in reply said, “O Deva! The different living entities of the earthly planetary systems have fallen to the lower correctional regions. They are suffering extremely for their misdeeds. The horrible crying is because of suffering from the inflictions of their past bad actions.”

After hearing this, the Supreme Lord Vishnu went to the lower correctional region to the south. When the inhabitants saw who had come, they began to cry even louder. The heart of the Supreme Lord Vishnu became filled with compassion. Lord Vishnu thought to Himself, “I have created all this progeny, and it is because of Me that they are suffering.”

Vyasadeva continued: “O Jaimini, just listen to what the Supreme Lord did next. After the merciful Supreme Lord thought over what He had previously considered, He suddenly manifested from His own form the deity of the lunar day *Ekadasi*. Afterward, the different un-

## *The story of Ekadasi*

fortunate living entities began to follow the vow of *Ekadasi* and were then elevated quickly to the abode of Vaikuntha. O my child Jaimini, therefore the lunar day of *Ekadasi* is the selfsame form of the Supreme Lord, Vishnu, and the Supersoul within the heart of the living entities. *Sri Ekadasi* is the utmost pious activity and is situated at the head among all vows.”

Following the ascension of *Sri Ekadasi*, that personality who is the form of degraded activity or personification of bad *karma* gradually saw the influence that she, *Ekadasi*, had. Thus, he approached Lord Vishnu with doubts in his heart and began offering many prayers, whereupon Lord Vishnu became very pleased and said, “I have become very pleased with your nice offerings. What boon is it that you want?”

The Papa-purusha replied, “I am Your created progeny, and it is through me that you wanted distress given to the living entities who are very degraded. Now, by the influence of *Sri Ekadasi*, I have become all but destroyed. O Prabhu! After I die all of Your parts and parcels who have accepted material bodies will become liberated and return to the abode of Vaikuntha (the spiritual domain). If this liberation of all living entities takes place, then who will carry on Your activities? There will be no one to enact the pastimes in the earthly planetary systems!

“O Keshava! If you want these eternal pastimes to carry on, then You please save me from the fear of *Ekadasi*. No type of pious activity can bind me. But *Ekadasi* only, being Your own manifested form, can impede me. Out of fear of *Sri Ekadasi* I have fled, and taken shelter of men, animals, insects, hills, trees, moving and non-moving living entities, rivers, oceans, forests, heavenly, earthly, and hellish planetary systems, demigods, and the Gandharvas. I cannot find a place where I can be free from the fear of *Sri Ekadasi*. “O my Master! I am a product

of Your creation, so therefore very mercifully direct me to a place where I can reside fearlessly.” Vyasadeva then said to Jaimini, “After saying this, the embodiment of all degrading activities (Papa-purusha) fell down at the feet of the Supreme Lord Vishnu, who is the destroyer of all miseries and began to cry.”

After this, Lord Vishnu, observing the condition of the Papa-purusha, with laughter began to speak thus: “O Papa-purusha, rise up! Don’t lament any longer. Just listen, and I’ll tell you where you can stay on the lunar day of *Ekadasi*. On the date of *Sri Ekadasi*, which is the benefactor of the three planetary systems, you can take shelter of foodstuffs in the form of grains. There is no reason to worry about this any more, because My form as *Sri Ekadasi* will no longer impede you.” After giving direction to the Papa-purusha, the Supreme Lord Vishnu disappeared and the Papa-purusha returned to the performance of his own activities.

Therefore, those persons who are serious about the ultimate benefit of the soul will never eat grains on *Ekadasi*. According to the instructions of Lord Vishnu, every kind of degrading activity that can be found in the material world takes its residence in this place of (grains) foodstuff. Whoever follows *Ekadasi* is freed from all bad *karma* and never enters into the lower regions.

‘On *Ekadasi*, do not eat grains, do not eat grains, do not eat grains!’ Whether one be a *kshatriya*, *vaishya*, *shudra*, or of any family, he should follow the lunar day of *Ekadasi*. From this the perfection of *varna* and *ashrama* will be attained. Especially since if one (even) by trickery follows *Ekadasi*, all his sins become destroyed and he very easily attains the supreme goal, the abode of Vaikuntha.

*Description from the 14th chapter of the Padma Purana, from the section entitled “Kriya-sagara-sara”.*



## **Additional/Conclusive Information on *Ekadasi***

From the above story we can understand that the Supreme Lord is very compassionate towards human beings who were created by Him. Therefore the Lord took the form of *Ekadasi*. By observing the *Ekadasi* vow, it not only decreases the amount of bad *karma* we imbibe, but it also eats up bad *karmic* reactions to help pave our way back to the abode of Lord Vishnu, Vaikuntha. This is also why *Ekadasi* is called ‘The mother of devotion’. It helps remove the obstacles on our path of spiritual life.

*Ekadasi* generally falls on the 11th day after the new moon, and the 11th day after the full moon. *Eka* means one and *dasi* is the feminine form of *dasa*, which means ten. Together it means eleven. Only occasionally may it fall on a different day. So it is on these days that many spiritualists follow the vow of *Ekadasi* and not eat any beans or grains, or products with such substances in them. Thus, the diet is expected to be simple and plain as part of the mood of renunciation, and preferably only once in the day if possible. Other recommendations include that the food should be made of vegetables, fruit, water, milk products, nuts, sugar, and roots that are grown underground (except beet roots).

Since there are 12 months in a year, with two *Ekadasis* in each month, there are 24 *Ekadasis* in each year. Each *Ekadasi* has a name, that are *Utpanna*, *Mokshada*, *Saphala*, *Putrada*, *Shat-tila*, *Jaya*, *Vijaya*, *Amalaki*, *Papamocani*, *Kamada*, *Varuthini*, *Mohini*, *Apara*, *Nirjala*, *Yogini*, *Padma* (*Devashayani*), *Kamika*, *Putrada*, *Aja*, *Parivartini*, *Indira*, *Papankusha*, *Rama*, and *Haribodhini* (*Devotthani*). Occasionally there are two extra *Ekadasis* that happen in a lunar leap year, which are *Padmini* and *Parama*.

Each *Ekadasi* day has particular benefits and blessings that one can attain by the performance of specific activities done on that day. By engaging in the extra study to learn what these are, one can derive even more benefit from each particular *Ekadasi*. Books devoted to *Ekadasi* are available that contain such information, so we will not include it here.

However, reading the glories of each *Ekadasi* day, along with all the names of these days, will also achieve a similar goal of observing the *Ekadasi* vow. This also means that we are encouraged to increase our spiritual activities that day, which are centered on the chanting of the holy names of the Lord. Charity, especially to advanced spiritualists and preachers of the *dharma*, or directly engaging in activities of God/Krishna consciousness, Deity worship, chanting the *purushasukta* hymns, or other spiritual activities on *Ekadasi* are also highly recommended and brings great spiritual benefits to the performer.

It is said that even if one mistakenly misses the observance of an *Ekadasi*, he or she may make up for it by observing it the very next day on *Dvadasi*, and then break one's fast from grain on the next day, *Trayodasi*. One may also observe the special fast on *Nirjala Ekadasi*. This is also called *Bhima Ekadasi*. This is because the Pandava brother known as Bhima was so strong and had such a voracious appetite that he could not observe *Ekadasi*s twice a month. He could not fast because he was too hungry.

So Lord Krishna told him to merely observe one *Ekadasi* a year, which is the *Nirjala Ekadasi*. *Nirjala* means no water. So he had to observe at least one *Ekadasi* a year, and on that day he had to abstain from not only beans and grains, but from all foods, even water. So devotees who miss an *Ekadasi* day often observe a complete fast from all food and liquids on the *Nirjala Ekadasi*, which is usually some time in June, and thus make up for whatever was missed. However, this is

### *Additional/Conclusive Information on Ekadasi*

a very potent *Ekadasi*, so a complete fast on this day gives one who observes this many pious credits.

Sometimes there is a day called *Mahadvadasi*. This is when *Ekadasi* is astronomically combined with *Dvadasi*, or the twelfth day of the full moon or new moon lunar cycle. This is called a pure *Ekadasi* and the observance is often started the evening before *Mahadvadasi* and through the next day with the basic *Ekadasi* fast.

Breaking the *Ekadasi* fast on the next day with some foodstuffs made from grains is usually done two-and-a-half hours or shortly thereafter from the time of the sunrise.

In the Caitanya-caritamrita (*Adi-lila*, 15-9-10), Sri Caitanya begs his mother to follow *Ekadasi*, as was expected of all His followers. And in the purport to this verse Srila Prabhupada explains that even though devotees eat food cooked for and offered to Lord Vishnu, *prasada*, which is spiritually potent and free from all *karma*, even on *Ekadasi* a devotee does not eat even *maha-prasada* that has grains in it, even though it can be saved for the next day. In this way, by the observance of the special *Ekadasi* day and its special fast, a person can accelerate their spiritual growth and awareness, and free himself or herself from negative *karma* that will only further bind them to the continuous rounds of birth and death.

There are different pastimes of the Lord that happen in different cycles. *Satya Yuga*, the previous cycle or the *Maha Yuga* states another interesting story behind *Ekadasi*.

In a previous age, *Satya-yuga* there once lived a fearsome demon called Mura. Mura was always in a foul angry mood, he terrified all the demigods, defeating even Indra, the king of heaven, Vivasvan, the sun-god, the eight Vasus, Lord Brahma the creator, Vayu, the wind-god, and Agni, the fire-god. With his terrible power, he subjugated all of them to his demands thereby reigning over the creation.

Out of great fear, the demigods approached Lord Vishnu, the lord of creation, and prayed to Him for help. Hearing the prayers and request from Indra, Lord Vishnu became very angry with Mura and said, “O powerful demigods, all together you may now advance and attack Mura’s capital city of Candravati.” Encouraged thus, the assembled demigods proceeded to Candravati with Lord Vishnu leading the way.

There was a bloody fight between the soldiers of Mura and the demigods. Many hundreds of demons were killed by the Lord’s hand. At last, the chief demon, Mura, began fighting with the Lord, first with weapons, then with bare hands.

The Lord wrestled with Mura for one thousand celestial years and then, apparently fatigued, left to rest at Badarika-asrama in the Himalayas. At Badarika-asrama, he found and entered a very beautiful cave, named Himavati, to rest. The Mura followed Him into the cave, and, seeing Him asleep, started thinking, “Today I will kill this slayer of all demons, Vishnu.”

While the wicked demon Mura was making plans in this way, from Lord Vishnu’s body there manifested a young girl who had a very bright complexion. Mura saw that she was equipped with various brilliant weapons and was ready to fight.

Challenged by that female to enter into battle, Mura prepared himself and then fought with her. As they fought, Mura became very astonished when he saw that she fought with him without cessation. The king of demons then said: “Who has created this angry, fearsome girl who is fighting me so powerfully, just like a thunderbolt falling upon me?” After saying this, the demon continued to fight with the girl.

Suddenly that effulgent goddess shattered all of Mura’s weapons and in a moment deprived him of his chariot. He ran toward her to

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attack her with his bare hands, but when she saw him coming, she angrily cut off his head. Thus, the demon at once fell to the ground. Then the Supreme Lord woke up and saw the dead demon before Him, as well as the maiden bowing down to Him with joined palms. The Lord, being pleased with the girl, offered to give her any boon that she desired.

The maiden said: “O Lord, if You are pleased with me and wish to give me a boon, then give me the power to deliver persons who fast entirely on this day from all their unfavorable *karma*. Please also grant all those who fast in any way on this day a spiritual attitude, wealth, and at last liberation.”

The Supreme Personality of Godhead said, “O most pious lady, what you have requested is granted. All My devotees in this world will surely fast on your day, and thus they will become famous throughout the three worlds and finally come and stay with Me in My abode. Because you, My transcendental potency, have appeared on the eleventh day of the waning moon, let your name be *Ekadasi*. If a person fasts on *Ekadasi*, I will remove all his unfavorable *karma* and bring him to my transcendental abode.”





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