



KRISHNA VOICE

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Sri Brahmotsava 2021

PANIHATI

Wednesday - June 23, 2021

CHIDA DAHI MAHOTSAV

The festival of compassion



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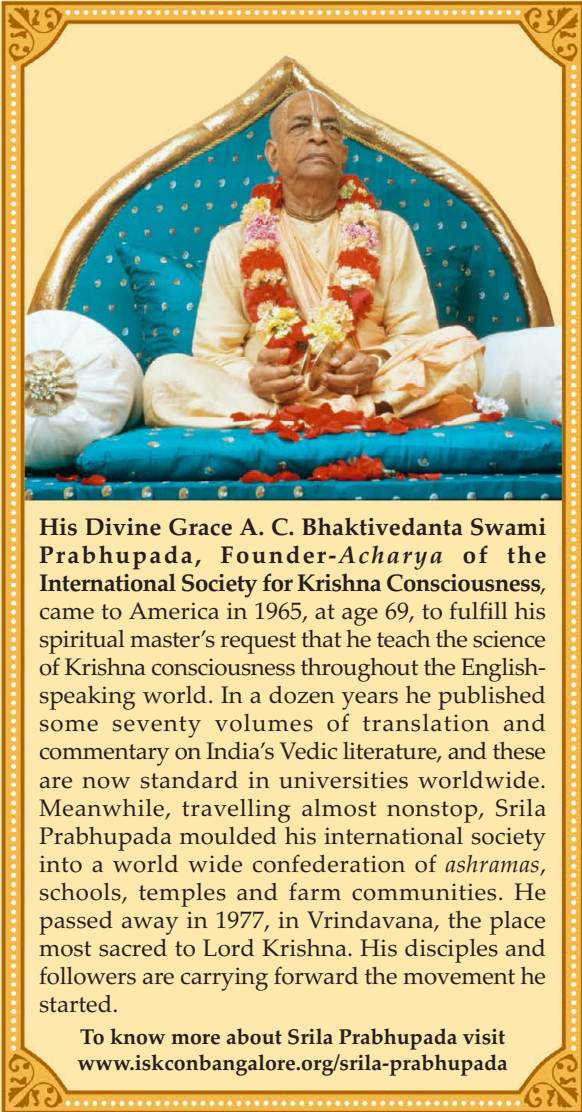
For more details of the festival visit:
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KRISHNA VOICE



Vol 22, No.6

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His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Founder-Acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, came to America in 1965, at age 69, to fulfill his spiritual master's request that he teach the science of Krishna consciousness throughout the English-speaking world. In a dozen years he published some seventy volumes of translation and commentary on India's Vedic literature, and these are now standard in universities worldwide. Meanwhile, travelling almost nonstop, Srila Prabhupada moulded his international society into a world wide confederation of *ashramas*, schools, temples and farm communities. He passed away in 1977, in Vrindavana, the place most sacred to Lord Krishna. His disciples and followers are carrying forward the movement he started.

To know more about Srila Prabhupada visit
www.iskconbangalore.org/srila-prabhupada

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Krishna's Emissary

A lecture by

His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

Founder-Acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness

Los Angeles, December 9, 1969

Disappearance Day of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Gosvami Maharaja

There is a nice story about a sage giving different blessings to different types of persons. To a prince, he blessed, *raja-putra ciram jiva*: "You are a king's son, a prince. May you live forever." And he blessed the son of a saintly person, *muni putra ma jiva*: "Don't live." And the *sadhu*, the devotee, he blessed, *jiva va maro va*: "Either you live or you die as you like." And there was a butcher. The sage blessed him, *ma jiva ma mara*: "Don't die, don't live."

These words are very significant. A prince is enjoying his senses, that's all. He has enough facility for sense enjoyment. So his next life will be hellish, because if you indulge in unrestricted sex life, Krishna will give you facility to have sex three times in an hour, just like the pigeons, the monkeys, the sparrows.

Princes are after sense enjoyment. So the sage blessed the prince, "Better you live forever, because after your death you do not know what is going to happen to you. You are going to get a hellish life. Better you live for some time. Go on with your enjoyment."

And *muni-putra ma jiva*. The *brahmachari* student working under the strict disciplinary guidance of a spiritual master is blessed, *ma jiva*: "You'd better die. You are trained so as to enter into the kingdom of God, so why should you take so much trouble? Better you die and go back to Godhead."

The sage blessed the devotee, *jiva va maro va*: "My dear devotee, either you live or die," because for a devotee it's the same.

And the butcher the sage blessed, *ma jiva ma mara*: "Don't live, don't die." What's a butcher to do? His life is so abominable. From the morning, he has to slaughter so many animals, see the blood stains, the ghastly scenes. That is his livelihood. What a horrible life this is! So "Don't live. And don't die also." Because after death—oh, he is going to be in such a hellish condition, nobody can describe it. So both conditions—life and death—are horrible.

Apart from the others, for the devotee both birth and death, appearance and disappearance, are the same.

My spiritual master appeared at Jagannatha Puri. He was the son of a very big government officer, Bhaktivinoda Thakura, who was a magistrate. In those days a magistrate was a big officer in the government, practically next to Governor. And Bhaktivinoda Thakura was in charge of the Jagannatha temple. That is the system in Jagannatha Puri. The manager in charge of the temple is the District Magistrate.

Once during the Ratha-yatra festival, Lord Jagannatha's car stopped in front of Bhaktivinoda Thakura's house. At that time, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, my Guru Maharaja [spiritual master], was a child in the lap of his mother. So the mother took the opportunity to come onto the car. Because she was the magistrate's wife, people gave way so she could go onto the car and place the child at the lotus feet of Jagannatha. There were many garlands, and one garland fell upon Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, blessing him.

When he was a child two or three years old, he ate a mango which was kept for offering to the Deity. His father mildly rebuked him, "Oh, you have done a very wrong thing. It was meant for the Deity, and you have taken it. You should not have done it."

The child was two or three years old, but he took it so seriously that after that he never ate a mango. Whenever we offered him one, he would say, "No, I am an offender. I cannot take mangoes." He was thinking like that, you see. Never in his life did he take a mango. He was thinking, "I offended in my childhood by taking the mango of the Deity."

This is the characteristic of *acharyas*. They teach by their life's action that one should be so determined. A child took the mango—there was no offense. But he took that vow.

Another instance, in my presence. At that time, I was a young man. One of my Godbrothers, Dr. Oudh Bihari Lal



Kapoor, was also young man, and his wife was also young. We were sitting together, talking with Guru Maharaja, and the girl proposed, "My dear master, I want to speak with you."

Guru Maharaja said, "Yes, you can say whatever you like."

She said, "I want to talk with you privately, not in everyone's presence."

Guru Maharaja said, "No. I cannot talk with you privately. You can talk in the presence of my other disciples."

Even though the girl was like his granddaughter by age, he refused to talk with a young woman in a private place.

Bhaktivinoda Thakura had many other sons. Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati was the fifth son. And he did not marry. From childhood he was a strict *brahmachari* [celibate]. And he underwent very severe penances for starting this worldwide movement. That was his mission.

Bhaktivinoda Thakura wanted to do this. In 1896 Bhaktivinoda Thakura wanted to introduce the Krishna consciousness movement by sending the book *Shree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, His Life and Precepts* to the West. Fortunately, that year was my birth year.

By Krishna's arrangement I came in contact with my Guru Maharaja. We were born in different families. Who knew that I would come to his protection? Who knew that I would come to America? Who knew that you American boys would come to me? These are all Krishna's arrangements. We cannot understand how things are taking place.

In 1936, thirty-two years ago, I was doing business in Bombay. At that time, Guru Maharaja was a little indisposed, and he was staying at Jagannatha Puri, on the seashore. So I wrote him a letter. "My dear master, your other disciples *brahmacharis*, *sannyasis* they are rendering you direct service. And I am a householder. I cannot live with you. I cannot serve you nicely. So I do not know how I can serve you."

Simply an idea. I was thinking of serving him. "How can I serve him seriously?"

The reply was dated 13th December, 1936. He wrote, "My dear such and such, I am very glad to receive your letter. I think you should try to push our movement in English. And that will do good to you and to the people who will help you." That was his instruction. And then on the 31st of December, that means just a fortnight after writing this letter, he passed away.

I took that order of my spiritual master very seriously. But I did not think that I'd have to do such and such things. I was at that time a householder. But this is the arrangement of Krishna. If we strictly try to serve the spiritual master's order, then Krishna will give us all facilities. That is the secret.

I took my spiritual master's order a little seriously by studying a commentary by Vishvanatha Chakravarthi Thakura on the *Bhagavad-gita*. In connection with the verse *vyavasayatmika-buddhih ekeha kuru-nandana*, Vishvanatha Chakravarthi Thakura comments that we should take up the words from the spiritual master as our life and soul. We should try to carry out the instruction, the specific instruction of the spiritual master, very rigidly, without caring for our personal benefit or loss.

So I tried a little bit in that spirit. And he has given me all facilities to serve him. Things have come to this stage, that in my old age I have come to your country and you are also taking this movement seriously, trying to understand it. We have got some books now. So there is a little foothold for this movement.

So on this occasion of my spiritual master's departure, as I am trying to execute his will, I shall also request you to execute the same order through my will. I am an old man. I can pass away at any moment. That is nature's law; nobody can check it. That I may die is not very astonishing. But this is my appeal to you on this auspicious day of the departure of my Guru Maharaja: At least to some extent you have understood the essence of the Krishna consciousness movement. You should try to push it on.

People are suffering for want of this consciousness. As we daily pray about devotees,

*vancha-kalpatarubhyas ca
krpa-sindhubhya eva ca
patitanam pavanebhyo
vaisnavebhyo namo namah*

When one is a Vaishnava, or devotee of the Lord, his life is dedicated for the benefit of the people. You know—most of you belong to the Christian community, how Lord Jesus Christ said that for your sinful activities he sacrificed

himself. That is the determination of devotees of the Lord. They don't care for personal comforts. They love Krishna, or God, so they love all living entities, because all living entities are related with Krishna. So similarly you should learn this. The Krishna consciousness movement means to become a Vaishnava and feel for suffering humanity.

To feel for suffering humanity there are different angles of vision. Some people think of the suffering of humanity in terms of the bodily conception of life. They try to open hospitals to give relief from disease or try to distribute food in poverty-stricken countries. These things are certainly very nice. But the actual suffering of humanity is due to lack of Krishna consciousness.

Bodily sufferings are temporary, and cannot be checked. Suppose you distribute food in a poverty-stricken country. That does not solve the whole problem. The real beneficial work is to invoke every person's Krishna consciousness.

Suppose a rich man's son is loitering in the street, forgetting his father's opulence and property, and somebody, out of sympathy, gives him some food. But another person comes to him and says, "Oh, my dear boy, I know you. You are the son of such and such rich man. Why you are loitering in the street? Come on. I shall take you to your father." So if that gentleman takes the loitering boy to his father, the father is glad, the boy inherits his father's property, and his whole problem of life becomes solved.

Similarly, every living entity has been loitering within this universe in different bodies, in different planets, from time immemorial. And he doesn't know that he belongs to the kingdom of God, that he is the direct son of Krishna, God, that Krishna is the proprietor of everything, and that he can enjoy his father's property and automatically solve the problems of material conditioned life.

If you become a rich man, if you can possess millions of dollars, then your poverty is automatically solved. Similarly, if you become Krishna conscious and you act in that way, then all other problems in the material conditional life are solved.

In *Bhagavad-gita* the Lord says that peoples' sufferings are due to their sinful activities, and sinful activities are caused by ignorance. Suppose a foreigner like me comes to America and does not know that cars are driven on the right side of the road. In India the car is driven on the left side. So suppose a person does not know and he drives the car on the left and gets involved in an accident. If he is taken into police custody and says, "Sir, I did not know that here the car is driven on the right side," that does not excuse him. The law will punish him.

So ignorance is the cause of sinful activities or breaking the law. And when you commit some sinful activity, you have to suffer the result. The whole world is in ignorance. And due to ignorance everyone is implicated in so many actions and reactions, either good or bad.

Ultimately, there is nothing good within this material world; everything is bad. We have manufactured something good and something bad. But in the *Bhagavad-gita* we learn that this place is *duhkhalayam asasvatam*, a place for misery. So in this miserable condition how can you say, "This is good" or "This is bad"? Everything is bad.

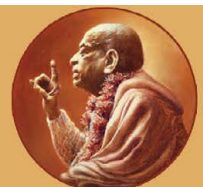
One should be very much pessimistic about the material world. Then one can make advancement in spiritual life. *Duhkhalayam asasvatam*. This place is full of miseries. If you study analytically, you'll find simply miserable conditions.

Therefore we should give up our material conditional life, and in Krishna consciousness we should try to elevate ourselves to the spiritual platform and thereby be promoted to the kingdom of Godhead. Having gone there, no one comes back to this miserable world. That is the supreme abode of the Lord.

This Krishna consciousness movement is authorized and very important. Now, you American boys and girls who have taken to this movement, please take it more seriously. That is the mission of Lord Chaitanya and my Guru Maharaja. And I am also trying to execute their will by disciplic succession. You have come forward to help me. Although I shall go away, you shall live. I request you all: Don't give up pushing on this movement. Continue. You'll be blessed by Lord Chaitanya and His Divine Grace Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Goswami Prabhupada.

Thank you very much. 🙏

Srila Prabhupada, the founder-*acharya* of ISKCON, has delivered more than 1500 lectures on Vedic scriptures like *Bhagavad-gita*, *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and *Sri Chaitanya-charitamrita*. The audio recording of his lectures are available in ISKCON centers. You can also hear some of these lectures in www.iskconbangalore.org/srila-prabhupada-lectures



SRILA PRABHUPADA SPEAKS OUT

LSD and Liberation

The following conversation between Srila Prabhupada and the poet Allen Ginsberg took place in Columbus, Ohio, on May 11, 1969.

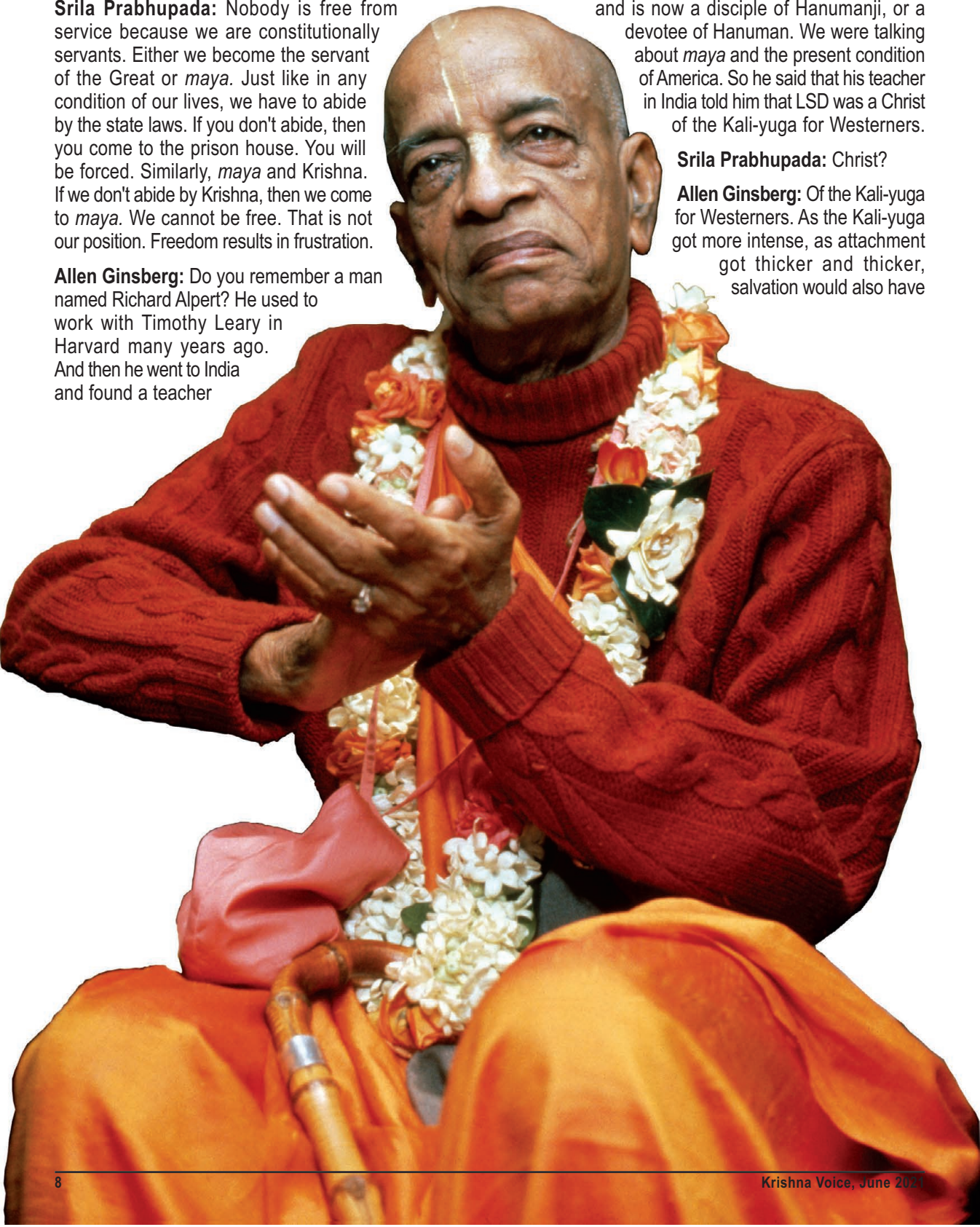
Srila Prabhupada: Nobody is free from service because we are constitutionally servants. Either we become the servant of the Great or *maya*. Just like in any condition of our lives, we have to abide by the state laws. If you don't abide, then you come to the prison house. You will be forced. Similarly, *maya* and Krishna. If we don't abide by Krishna, then we come to *maya*. We cannot be free. That is not our position. Freedom results in frustration.

Allen Ginsberg: Do you remember a man named Richard Alpert? He used to work with Timothy Leary in Harvard many years ago. And then he went to India and found a teacher

and is now a disciple of Hanumanji, or a devotee of Hanuman. We were talking about *maya* and the present condition of America. So he said that his teacher in India told him that LSD was a Christ of the Kali-yuga for Westerners.

Srila Prabhupada: Christ?

Allen Ginsberg: Of the Kali-yuga for Westerners. As the Kali-yuga got more intense, as attachment got thicker and thicker, salvation would also have



to get easier and easier.

Srila Prabhupada: That is a very nice statement that in the Kali-yuga salvation becomes much easier. That is the version of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* also, but that process is this *kirtana* [chanting the names of God], not LSD.

Allen Ginsberg: Well, the reasoning was that for those who would only accept salvation in a purely material form, in a chemical form finally, Krishna had the humour to emerge as a pill.

Srila Prabhupada: No, the thing is that with any material form, where is there salvation? It is illusion.

Allen Ginsberg: Well, the subjective effect is to cut attachment during...

Srila Prabhupada: No. If you have got attachment for something material, then where is the cut-off of attachment? LSD is a material chemical.

Allen Ginsberg: Yeah.

Srila Prabhupada: So if you have to take shelter of LSD, then you are taking help from matter. So how are you free from matter?

Allen Ginsberg: Well, the subjective experience is, while in the state of intoxication of LSD you also realize that LSD is a material pill, and that it does not really matter.

Srila Prabhupada: So that is risky. That is risky.

Allen Ginsberg: Yeah. Now, so if LSD is a material attachment, which it is, I think, then is not sound, *shabda*, also a material attachment?

Srila Prabhupada: No, *shabda* is spiritual. Just like in the Bible it is said, "Let there be creation." This sound is spiritual sound. Creation was not there. The sound produced the creation. Therefore, sound is originally spiritual, and from sound, sky develops; from sky, air develops; from air, fire develops; from fire, water develops; from water, land develops.

Allen Ginsberg: Sound is the first element of creation?

Srila Prabhupada: Yes, yes.

Allen Ginsberg: What was the first sound traditionally?

Srila Prabhupada: The Vedic literature states, *om*. So at least we can understand from your Bible that God said, "Let there be creation." So there is this sound, and then there is creation. God and His sound are nondifferent, absolute. I say, "Mr. Ginsberg," and this sound and I are different. But God is nondifferent from His energy. *Shakti shaktimatour abhedah*. *Shakti*, energy, and *shaktimat*, the energetic. They are nondifferent. Just like fire and heat, they are nondifferent, but heat is not fire. You cannot differentiate heat from fire, or fire from heat. But fire is not heat.

Allen Ginsberg: Well, the sound Krishna...

Srila Prabhupada: Yes, it is nondifferent from Krishna.

Allen Ginsberg: Under all circumstances.

Srila Prabhupada: Yes, under all circumstances. But it is a question of my appreciation, or my realization. That will depend on my purity. Otherwise, this Krishna sound and Krishna are nondifferent. Therefore if we vibrate the sound Krishna, then we are immediately in contact with Krishna. And because Krishna is wholly spiritual, then we become spiritualized. Just like if you touch electricity, immediately you're electrified. And the more you become electrified [by vibrating the sound Krishna], the more you become Krishna-ized. So when you are fully Krishna-ized, you are on the Krishna platform. *Tyaktva deham punar janma naiti mam eti so 'rjuna*. You don't come back to this material existence. You remain with Krishna. 🙏

Fasting		Festivals	
Jun 6	Ekadashi	Jun 4	Hanuman Jayanthi (in ISKCON Bangalore)
Jun 7	break fast	Jun 23	Panihati Chida Dahi Utsava
Jun 21	Ekadashi	Jun 24	Jagannatha Snana Yatra
Jun 22	break fast		

Rational "Mythology"

Can a rational person accept the stories of the Puranas as literally true?

A lecture by Shadaputa Dasa

Presented at the Parliament of the World's Religion, Chicago, 1993

In Vivekananda Swami's famous lecture on Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions in 1893, he began by outlining some of the salient features of traditional Hinduism. He mentioned karma, reincarnation, and the problem of evil in the material world. He went on to explain that the solution to this problem depends on seeking refuge in God. God is that one "by whose command the wind blows, the fire burns, the clouds rain, and death stalks upon the earth." He is the source of strength and the support of the universe. He is everywhere, pure, almighty, and all-merciful. And we are related to God as a child to a father or mother and as a friend to a beloved friend.

Vivekananda said that we are to worship God through unselfish love, and he pointed out that the way to achieving love of God was "fully developed and taught by Krishna, whom the Hindus believe to have been God incarnate on earth." Through love we are to perfect ourselves, reach God, see God, and enjoy bliss with God. On this, he said, all Hindus are agreed. But he went on to say that in the final stage of realization, God is seen to be impersonal Brahman. The individual then ends separate existence by realizing his identity with Brahman. Making an analogy with physical science, he said, "Physics would stop when it would be able to fulfill its services in discovering one energy of which all the others are but manifestations, and the science of religion [would] become perfect when it would discover... One who is the only Soul of which all souls are but delusive manifestations."

The Pros and Cons of Pure Monism

Vivekananda's strictly monistic concept of God has a long history. The idea has always been linked with the rational, speculative approach to reality. For example, in the fifth century B.C., the Greek philosopher Parmenides concluded by speculative arguments that "only One Thing can possibly exist and that this One Thing is uncreated, unchangeable, indestructible, and immovable. Plurality, creation, change, destruction, and motion are mere appearances."

Parmenides argued that the One must have no parts distinct from one another, for otherwise it would be not One but many. Thus he concluded that the One must be a sphere of perfectly uniform substance. But even a sphere has an inside and an outside, and so it is marked by duality, not oneness. The idea of absolute oneness, or pure monism, may seem alluring, but it requires us to give up all conceivable attributes and finally give up thought itself.

Vivekananda recognized this problem, and he argued that in the Hindu religion specific forms of gods and goddesses serve as symbols to help us visualize the inconceivable. Thus he said, "The Hindus have discovered that the absolute can only be realized, or thought of, or stated, through the relative, and the images, crosses, and crescents are simply so many symbols, so many pegs to hang the spiritual ideas on."

The idea of religious imagery as a symbol for the unthinkable Absolute sometimes turns out useful in the modern age. Vivekananda was born in Calcutta in 1863 as Narendranath Datta, and he grew up during the high noon of British dominance in India. During this period, European rationalism, based on the famous French Enlightenment, made a strong impact on India. Reformers like Rammohan Roy and Devendranath Tagore founded the Brahma Samaj in an effort to revise Hinduism and make it compatible with modern Western thinking. This effort required the solving of two problems: (1) the problem of religious plurality and (2) the problem of the clash between modern science and old religious beliefs.



Vivekananda Swami

The old philosophy of pure monism, or *advaita*, is well suited to solve these problems. First of all, if religious imagery has only a symbolic meaning that refers to something inconceivable, then many different systems of symbols should work equally well. In this way, all major religious systems can be reconciled. This was Vivekananda's idea, and he greatly stressed the equality of all religions.

Likewise, if religious imagery is simply symbolic, then there is no question of a conflict between religion and science. A religious story that seems to conflict with established scientific facts can simply be interpreted as a symbolic clue pointing to the One beyond the grasp of the finite scientific mind. Vivekananda also mentioned that the stark simplicity of the impersonal Brahman fits with the simplicity sought by physicists in their hoped-for Grand Unified Theory of nature.

But in pure monism, what becomes of love of God, or indeed, love of anyone? If the ultimate reality is pure oneness, and personal existence is illusory, then love is also illusory. Love requires two, and not just two of anything. Two persons are needed for a relationship of love. If such relationships do have spiritual reality, then at least two spiritual persons must eternally exist. In traditional Hindu thought, there are, in fact, two categories of eternal persons: (1) the *jiva* souls that live in individual material bodies and (2) the original Supreme Personality of Godhead and His countless spiritual expansions. As Vivekananda pointed out, Hindus believe that the Supreme Being incarnated on earth as Krishna, who expounded on the ways of loving devotional reciprocation between Himself and individual *jiva* souls.

Unfortunately, after making this point, Vivekananda rejected both Krishna and the individual soul as illusory. In his monistic approach to religion, all conceivable features of the Absolute are ruled out. Beingness, knowledge, and bliss are three, and they must be discarded from the One as earthbound misconceptions. The same is true of the might and mercy of the Lord. Likewise, if the real truth is absolute oneness, all personal relationships of admiration, friendship, parental love, or conjugal love must be given up as delusions.

The Vaishnava Alternative Given by Bhaktivinoda Thakura

It is natural then to ask if some other solution is available to the problems posed when modern rational thought meets the multiplicity of religious systems. To explore this, I now turn to the life of Bhaktivinoda Thakura, a contemporary of Swami Vivekananda.

Bhaktivinoda Thakura was born in 1838 as Kedaranath Datta in the Nadia district of West Bengal. As a young man he acquired an English education, and he used to exchange thoughts on literary and spiritual topics with Devendranath Tagore, the Brahmo Samaj leader and Vivekananda's early teacher. In due course he studied law, and for many years he supported his family as a magistrate in the British court system.

Bhaktivinoda Thakura deeply studied the religious thought of his day. He scrutinized the works of European philosophers, and he was greatly impressed with the devotional teachings of Jesus Christ. At first, his Western education inclined him to look down on the Vaishnava literature of devotional service to Krishna. Indeed, he wrote that the *Bhagavata*, one of the main texts describing Krishna, "seemed like a repository of ideas scarcely adopted to the nineteenth century."

But at a certain point he ran across a work about the great Vaishnava reformer Lord Chaitanya, and he was able to obtain the commentary Chaitanya had given on the *Bhagavata* to the *advaita* Vedantists of Benares. This created in him a great love for the devotional teachings of Krishna as presented by Chaitanya. In due course he achieved an exalted state of spiritual realization by following Chaitanya's teachings, and he wrote many books presenting those teachings to people both in India and abroad.

A Historical Interlude

Before we go into Bhaktivinoda Thakura's spiritual

Reconstruction of Hindu Chronology

by Sir William Jones

Occidental History	Hindu History	Years from 1788 A.D.	Date
Adam	Menu I, Age I	5794 B.C.	4006 B.C.
Noah	Menu II	4737	2949
Deluge		4138	2350
Nimrod	Hiranyacasipu, Age II	4006	2218
Bel	Bali	3892	2104
	Rama, Age II	3817	2029
	Noah's death	3787	1999
	Pradyota	2817	1029
	Buddha, Age IV	2815	1027
	Nanda	2487	699
	Balin	1937	149
	Vicramaditya	1844	56
	Devapala	1811	23
Christ		1787	1 A.D.
	Narayanpala	1721	67
	Saca	1709	79
Walid		1080	708
Mahmud		786	1002
Shengez		548	1250
Taimur		391	1397
Babur		276	1512
Nadirshah		49	1739

Ages I, II, III, and IV are the Satya-, Treta-, Dvapara-, and Kali-yugas. Menu I is Svayambhuva Manu. Menu II is Vaivasvata Manu.



Bhaktivinoda Thakura

teachings, let me give an explicit idea of the intellectual climate in which he was operating in late nineteenth-century Bengal. To do this, I will quote a passage from the writings of Sir William Jones, a jurist who worked for the British East India Company and was the first president of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. In an article on Hindu chronology written in 1788, Jones gave the following account of the close of Dvapara-yuga, the Third Age of the *Puranas* and the *Mahabharata*:

I cannot leave the third Indian age, in which the virtues and vices of mankind are said to have been equal, without observing, that even the close of it is manifestly fabulous and poetical, with hardly more appearance of historical truth, than the tale of Troy, or of the Argonauts; for Yudhisthira, it seems, was the son of Dherma, the Genius of Justice; Bhima of Pavan, or the God of Wind; Arjun of Indra, or the Firmament; Nacul and Sahadeva of the Cumars, the Castor and Pollux of India; and Bhishma, their reputed great uncle, was the child of Ganga, or the Ganges, by Shantanu, whose brother Devapi is supposed to be still alive in the city of Calapa; all which fictions may be charming embellishments of an heroic poem, but are just as absurd in civil History,

as the descent of two royal families from the Sun and the Moon.

What Jones is referring to here is the story in the *Mahabharata* of events in India at the time of Krishna's advent. According to Hindu tradition, these events took place about five thousand years ago, when the Dvapara-yuga gave way to the present epoch, called the Kali-yuga. Yudhisthira, Arjuna, Bhima, Nakula, and Sahadeva are the five Pandava brothers who figured in many of Krishna's pastimes.

We can see from Jones's comments that he does not regard the story of the Pandavas as true history. Why not? For many of us, the problem is that the story contains elements simply not credible to a person trained in the modern rational viewpoint. We know that people don't descend from demigods. All documents putting forth such nonsense are rejected by responsible historians, so objective historical accounts hold no such absurdities. Such things never happened, and our history books abundantly confirm this.

Sir William Jones was clearly thinking along these lines, but he was not exactly a modern rationalist. Jones was a Christian who believed fully in the Mosaic chronology of the Bible. The table on page 11 shows how Jones attempted to reconstruct Hindu chronology to bring it in line with Christian. Jones, it seems, was able to scorn Hindu myths as absurd while at the same time accepting as true the supernatural events of the Bible.

It is perhaps poetic justice that the same scornful treatment Jones applied to the *Mahabharata* was soon applied to the Bible. During Jones's lifetime, the "higher" scientific criticism of the Bible was being developed in Germany, and it was unleashed in England in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1860, the Anglican theologians Benjamin Jowett and Baden Powell stole attention from Darwin's newly published book *On the Origin of Species* by a controversial essay that rejected miracles, on scientific grounds. The Darwinists and the higher Biblical critics quickly joined forces, and Darwin's supporter Thomas Huxley began quoting German Biblical scholars in his essays on the interpretation of Genesis. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, rational, scientific scepticism became the only acceptable path for a scholar or intellectual in any respectable field of study.

The Bhagavata

Bhaktivinoda Thakura was confronted with this hostile intellectual climate in his efforts to present spiritual knowledge to the young Bengali intellectuals of his day. After drinking in from their British teachers the ideas of William Jones and other Western orientalists, these young people were not at all inclined to give credence to old myths. How then could the teachings of Krishna on love of God be presented? Bhaktivinoda Thakura judiciously chose to give a partial picture of the truth that would introduce important spiritual ideas without invoking rejection due to deep-seated prejudices.

In a lecture delivered in Dinajpur, West Bengal, in 1869, he focused on the *Bhagavata*, or *Bhagavata Purana*, as the preeminent text on the nature of the Supreme and the means of realizing our relation with the Supreme.

Rejecting pure monism as a useless idea, he held that God is an eternal person. Thus he said, "The *Bhagavata* has ... a Transcendental, Personal, All-intelligent, Active, absolutely Free, Holy, Good, All-powerful, Omnipresent, Just and Merciful and supremely Spiritual Deity without a second, creating, preserving all that is in the universe." The highest object of the soul, he went on to say, is to "serve that Infinite Being for ever spiritually in the activity of Absolute Love."

Bhaktivinoda described the material world as the product of *maya*. Here *maya* means not illusion but the eternal energy of the Supreme that He uses to bewilder souls who desire to live outside of harmony with Him. The creation of the material world through *maya* is actually an aspect of the Lord's mercy, since He thereby allows independent-minded souls to act in a world from which God is apparently absent.

All these ideas are taken from the *Bhagavata* without modification. But in describing what the *Bhagavata* says about the details of the material universe, Bhaktivinoda Thakura adopted an indirect approach. Thus he said,

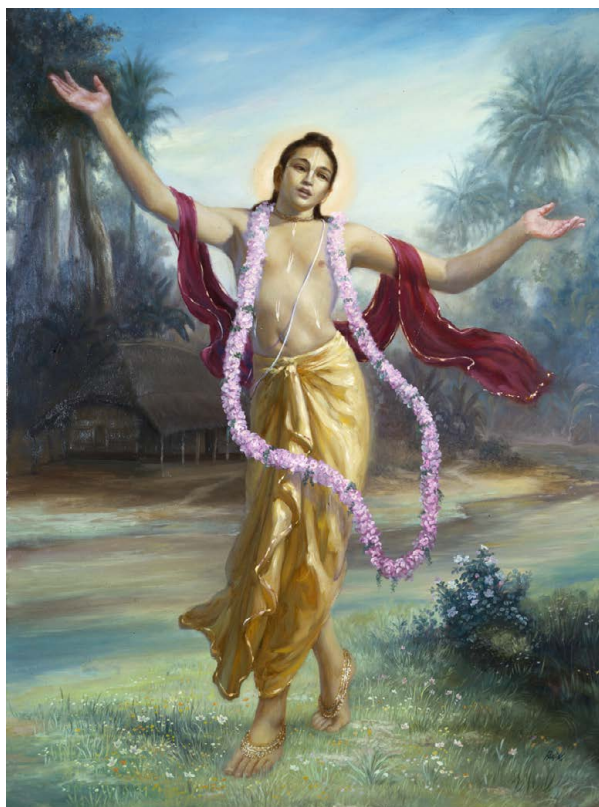
In the common-place books of the Hindu religion in which the Raja and Tama Gunas have been described as the ways of religion, we find description of a local heaven and a local hell; the heaven is as beautiful as anything on earth and the Hell as ghastly as any picture of evil. ... The religion of the Bhagavat is free from such a poetic imagination. Indeed, in some of the chapters we meet with descriptions of these hells and heavens, and accounts of curious tales, but we have been warned in some place in the book, not to accept them as real facts, but to treat them as inventions to overawe the wicked and to improve the simple and the ignorant.

In fact, the *Bhagavata* does ascribe reality to hells and heavens and their inhabitants. It describes in great detail the higher planetary systems and the various demigods who live there, including Brahma, Shiva, and Indra. Not only does the *Bhagavata* say that these beings are real, but it gives them an important role in the creation and maintenance of the universe. It also gives them a role in many of Krishna's manifest pastimes (*lilas*) within the material world. For example, in the story of the lifting of Govardhana Hill, it is Indra who creates a devastating storm when Krishna insults him by interfering with a sacrifice in his honour.

Bhaktivinoda Thakura chose to sidestep these "mythological" aspects of the *Bhagavata* in an effort to reach an audience of intellectuals whose mundane education ruled out such myths as absurd fantasy. Indeed, he went even further. In 1880 he published a treatise entitled *Sri Krishna Samhita* in which he elaborately explained the philosophy of Krishna consciousness. In this book he also put forth a reconstruction of Indian history similar to the one introduced by Sir William Jones to bring Hindu chronology into line with the Mosaic timetable of the Bible. This involved converting demigods and Manus into human kings and reducing their total span of history to a few thousand earthly years.

I should point out clearly that Bhaktivinoda Thakura did not personally accept the modified version of the *Bhagavata* he presented to the Bengali intellectuals. He actually accepted the so-called myths of the *Bhagavata* as true, and he presented them as such in many of his writings. For example, in his book *Jaiva Dharma*, Bhaktivinoda said this:

I have said that the Vaishnava religion came into being as soon as the creatures came into existence. Brahma was the first Vaishnava. Sriman Mahadeva is also a Vaishnava. The ancient Prajapatis are all Vaishnavas. Sri Narada Goswami, who is the fancy-born child of Brahma, is a Vaishnava.... You have seen the Vaishnava religion of the beginning of the creation. Then again when Gods, men, demons, etc., have been separately described, we get Prahlada and Dhruva from the very start.... Manu's sons and Prahlada are all grandsons of Prajapati, Kashyapa.... There is no doubt about it ... that the pure Vaishnava religion began with the beginning of history. Then the kings of the solar and lunar dynasties and all great and famous sages and hermits became devotees of Vishnu.



Lord Chaitanya

This passage was written in response to challengers who argued that Vaishnava *dharma* is a recent development. The passage takes it for granted that beings such as Brahma, Mahadeva, Narada, and Prahlada literally exist as described in the *shastras*, or Vedic scriptures. Many similar examples can be found in Bhaktivinoda Thakura's writings.

Now, if Bhaktivinoda Thakura accepted the literal truth of the *shastras*, how could he justify making presentations in which he denied it? His grand-disciple Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada has pointed out that there is a precedent for making such indirect presentations of *shastra*. An interpretation of a text that adheres directly to the dictionary definitions of its words is called *mukhya-vritti*, and an imaginary or indirect interpretation is called *lakshana-vritti* or *gauna-vritti*. Srila Prabhupada pointed out, "Sometimes ... as a matter of necessity, Vedic literature is described in terms of the *lakshana-vritti* or *gauna-vritti*, but one should not accept such explanations as permanent truths." In general, one should understand *shastra* in terms of *mukhya-vritti*.

The Theology of Visions

One might grant that Bhaktivinoda Thakura was justified in modifying the *shastras* to reach out to intellectuals trained to scorn old myths. But serious questions can still be raised: What is the scope for making such a presentation of religion today, and to what extent can such a presentation be regarded as true? Is the mythological material in the Hindu *shastras* unimportant, so that one might present it as true to people who believe in it and false to people who disbelieve? Or should we accept from modern knowledge that Hindu myths really are false and try to formulate a philosophy that preserves the essential idea of love of God while dispensing with superannuated ideas?

To answer these questions, let us see how we would have to reformulate Vaishnava philosophy to make it readily acceptable to Western intellectuals in the late twentieth century. To do this we must deviate to some extent from the prevailing materialistic framework of modern science. Physical scientists tell us that the mind, with all its conscious experiences, is simply a product of the brain. If we accept this, then all religious experience, whether it be the bliss of Brahman or *prema-bhakti*, love of God, is simply hallucinatory. If this is true, we can forget about religion—unless, of course, we like hallucinations.

For an alternative viewpoint, I will turn to the psychologist William James. Although James was a man of the nineteenth century, he was a Western scientist who applied the methods of empirical scientific research to the phenomena of religion. Thus his observations are still relevant today.

As a result of his studies, James reached the following conclusions:

The further limits of our being plunge, it seems to me, into an altogether other dimension of existence from the sensible and merely "understandable" world. Name it the mystical region, or the supernatural region, whichever you choose.... Yet the unseen region in question is not merely ideal, for it produces effects in this world. When we commune with it, work is actually done upon our finite personality, for we are turned into new men, and consequences in the way of conduct follow in the natural world upon our regenerative change. But that which produces effects with-in another reality must be termed a reality itself, so I feel as if we had no philosophic excuse for calling the unseen or mystical world unreal.

One could take this idea of a mystical or transcendent dimension and arrive at the following version of Vaishnava philosophy: Such a transcendental region does exist, and it is the eternal abode of Krishna. Advanced souls can perceive that realm in meditation by the grace of Krishna, and so they are able to enter into Krishna's eternal loving pastimes. But all Puranic descriptions of events within the material world have to be understood rationally through modern scientific knowledge. On the whole, the myths in the *Puranas* are not literally true. But the stories of Krishna's pastimes are not simply fantasy. Rather, they are spiritual transmissions into the meditative minds of great souls, and they refer not to this world but to the purely transcendental domain.

This is a philosophy that might appeal to many, and I will refer to it as the theology of visions. It allows one to retain the idea of love of God, while at the same time avoiding disturbing conflicts between mythological tales and modern knowledge. It also appears implicitly in the work of some modern scholars of religion who study the *bhakti* tradition.

To illustrate this, I will briefly consider an article, "Shrines of the Mind," by David Haberman, Assistant Professor of Religion at Williams College. In this article, Haberman argues that Vraja, the traditional place of Krishna's manifest *lilas*, is first and foremost a mental shrine, a realm that can be entered and experienced in meditation.

He argues that the physical Vraja, a tract of land near the North Indian city of Mathura, has only been a major center for the worship of Krishna since the sixteenth century, when the followers of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and other Vaishnavas "rediscovered" the lost sites of Krishna's pastimes. In fact, says Haberman, these sites never really existed before the sixteenth century, and so they weren't rediscovered. Rather, they were projected onto



Sir William Jones

the physical landscape of Vraja from the transcendental landscape perceived in meditation.

Haberman gives a number of interpretations of what happens when a person meditates on a mental shrine. These range from the contemplation of imaginary scenes in the ordinary sense to entry into "an eternal transcendent world which is perceptible only to the mind's eye and is reached through meditative technique." Since Haberman seems to lean toward the latter, it could be said that he is hinting at a version of the theology of visions: One can enter into Krishna's transcendental world by meditation, but Krishna never had any actual pastimes in the physical world. Physical, worldly history followed the lines revealed by modern scholarship. This means that many centuries ago in Vraja there may have been various primitive tribes following animistic cults, but there was no Krishna literally lifting Govardhana Hill.

Although this religious theory allows one to avoid certain conflicts with modern scholarship, it does have a number of drawbacks. A few of these are the following:

1. This theory is contrary to Vaishnava tradition, so

it calls into question the thinking of the many great souls who have supported the tradition. Since those great souls are the very meditators who have seen visions of Krishna, how can those visions be real? In other words, why should persons who see the absolute realm believe in the truth of myths that even worldly scholars see to be false?

2. This theory doesn't explain why the worship of Krishna should be a recent affair, as scholars claim. If there is an eternal realm of Krishna that can be accessed by meditation, why did people begin to access it only recently?

3. What does this theory say about the multiplicity of religions? Are the visions reported in other religious traditions real? If not, then why is it that Vaishnava visions alone are real? If so, then are there many transcendental realms, one for each religion? Or is it that people see in one transcendental realm whatever they are looking for?

4. This theory greatly limits the power of God. If God only appears in visions, what becomes of His role as the creator and controller of the universe? If we let modern science explain the material world, God's role is whittled down to practically nothing.

5. The theology of visions can easily be transformed into a purely psychological theory of religious experience. After all, this is the view that will be overwhelmingly favoured by psychologists, neuroscientists, and physical scientists of all varieties.

In view of objections (1) through (4), objection (5) is almost unavoidable. We are left with a totally mundane theory that explains religion away. In the case of Krishna's *lilas*, this line of thinking leads us to especially unpleasant conclusions. Thus Haberman describes meditation on Krishna *lila* as follows: "The desired end is a religious voyeurism and vicarious enjoyment said to produce infinite bliss." Such sad conclusions are avoided in the more balanced approach taken by traditional Vaishnavas, who stress Krishna's roles as the supreme creator and the performer of humanly impossible pastimes on earth.

Shifting the Boundary between Myth and Science

Yet if we start from the theology of visions and proceed in the inductive manner of scholars, we can see how it *could* serve as a steppingstone toward a more satisfactory theory. A starting point for developing such a theory can be a story related by Haberman about the Vaishnava saint Narottama Dasa Thakura.

It seems that Narottama was once meditating on boiling milk for Radha and Krishna. When the milk boiled over in his meditation, he took the vessel off the fire with his bare hands and got burned in the process. When Narottama awoke from his meditation, he discovered that his hands were actually burned.

There are many stories like this, and I will briefly mention two more. In the second story, Srinivasa Acharya, a contemporary of Narottama Dasa Thakura, was meditating on fanning Lord Chaitanya. In Srinivasa's meditation, Lord Chaitanya placed His garland around Srinivasa's neck. When Srinivasa awoke from meditation, the unusually fragrant garland was actually there, around his neck.

In the third story a Vaishnava saint named Duhkhi Krishna Dasa was sweeping the site of Krishna's *rasa* dance in Vraja. He found a remarkable golden anklet and hid it, since he thought that it was very important. Later, an old lady came to him and asked for the anklet. It turned out that the old lady was really Lalita, one of the transcendental maidservants of Radha and Krishna. The lady finally revealed that the anklet belonged to Radha Herself, and then she disclosed her true form as Lalita.

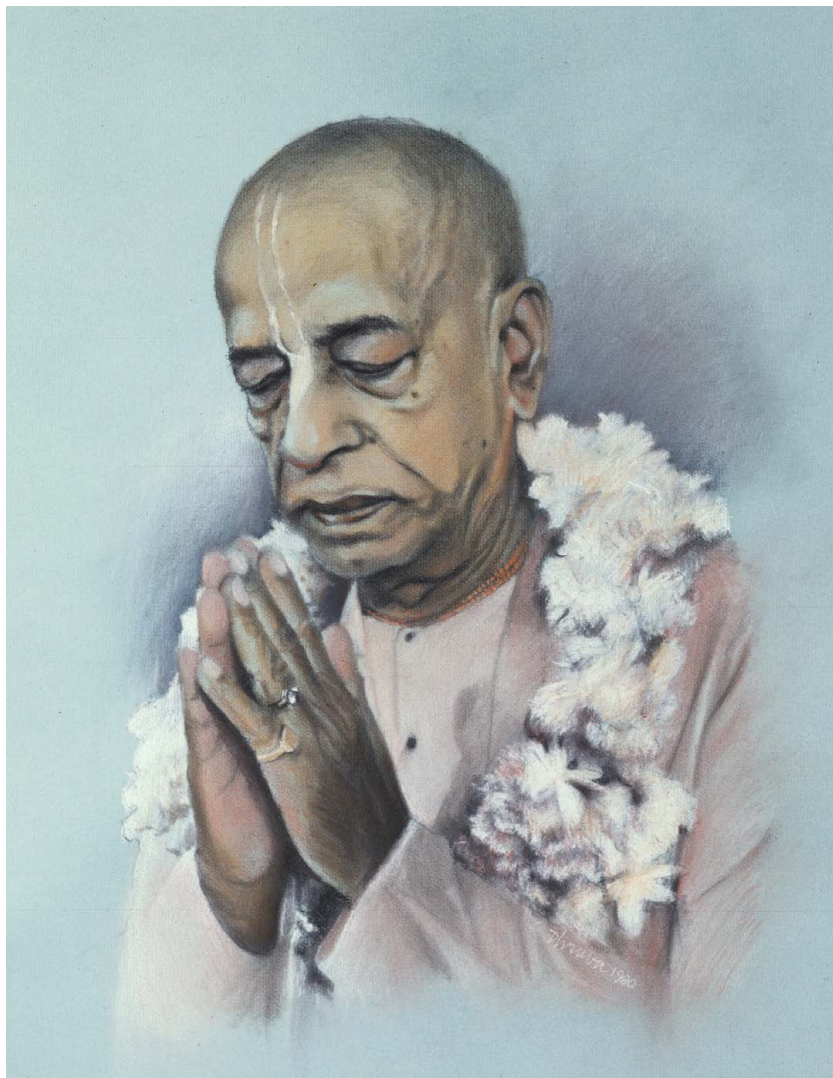
What are we to make of such stories? The story of the burned hands might be accepted by many scholars. After all, it is well known that Catholics meditating on the crucifixion of Christ sometimes develop stigmata, in which the wounds of Christ appear on their hands and feet. If meditation can somehow cause bleeding wounds, then maybe it can also cause burns.

The story of the miraculous garland goes one step further. Here a tangible object is said to materialize. This may seem fantastic, but it turns out that there is an extensive literature on materialization. For example, Stephen Braude, a professor of philosophy at the University of Maryland, has argued that many cases of alleged materializations produced by spirit mediums are backed up by solid empirical evidence that deserves serious study. If materializations by spiritualists might be factual, why not materializations of beautiful garlands by saintly persons?

This brings us to the third story. Although this story seems "far out," there are many similar stories in which a transcendent person seems to step into our material continuum, perform some action, and then disappear. Another example would be the story from *Chaitanya-charitamrita* in which Krishna, as a small boy, approached the saint Madhavendra Puri, gave him a pot of milk, and then mysteriously disappeared. Madhavendra Puri drank the milk, thus showing that it was tangible. Later that night he had a dream in which Krishna revealed the location of the Gopala Deity, which had originally been installed by Krishna's grandson Vajra and had been hidden during a Muslim attack.

The stories of the burned hand, the miraculous garland, and the transcendental visits are progressively harder and harder to accept from a conventional scientific standpoint. But it is hard to see how to draw a line between such stories that might possibly be true and ones that definitely cannot. And all the stories seem to hint at energetic exchanges between spiritual and material energy that might add an important new chapter to our scientific knowledge, if only they could be properly studied.

When we study a body of empirical evidence, we always evaluate it



His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

with our limiting assumptions. In the end, the conclusions we derive from the evidence may reflect our limiting assumptions as much as they reflect the evidence itself. If the assumptions change, the conclusions will also change, even though the evidence stays the same.

Consider what might happen if all the available evidence about the history of human experience were to be studied not through nineteenth-century rationalism but through a new science in which spiritual transformations of matter were considered a real possibility. The result might be a completely different picture of the past from the one now accepted by scholars.

For one thing, the objections that Sir William Jones expressed about the story of the Pandava brothers might not seem so weighty. If higher beings can step into our continuum from another realm, then humans might well descend from such beings. The new picture of the past might prove much more compatible with traditional spiritual teachings than the one that now prevails.

In the late twentieth century there are signs that a broader approach to science may be developing. In the days of Vivekananda and Bhaktivinoda Thakura, mechanistic, reductionistic science appeared to be marching unimpeded from triumph to triumph, and many people believed that it would soon find explanations for everything. But in the late twentieth century this triumphant march has been checked on many different fronts.

For example, physics in the 1890s looked like a closed subject, but in the early decades of the twentieth century it entered a phase of paradox and mystery with the development of relativity theory and quantum mechanics. The mysteries of quantum mechanics continue to inspire scientists to contemplate ideas that would have seemed outrageously mystical at the turn of the century.

But now physics has encountered an even more serious obstacle. The bold architects of universal physical theories are now realizing that these theories can never be adequately tested by experiment. Thus the Harvard physicist Howard Georgi characterized modern theoretical physics as "recreational mathematical theology."

In the mid-twentieth century, computer scientists believed they were on the verge of proving that thought is mechanical, thereby fulfilling La Mettrie's eighteenth-century dream of man as a machine. But in more recent years, even though computers have become more and more powerful, the dream of simulating human intelligence has seemed to recede further and further into the future.

With the discovery of the DNA spiral helix by Watson and Crick in 1953, many scientists thought that the ultimate secret of life had been revealed. Since then, molecular biologists have had tremendous success in shedding light on the mechanisms of living cells. But as molecular biology unveils the incredible complexity of these high-precision mechanisms, the goal of explaining the origin of life seems progressively more difficult to attain.

These are just a few of the many areas in which the program of mechanistic reductionism seems to be reaching ultimate limits as the twentieth century draws to a close. Perhaps as a result of these developments, many professional scientists are now showing a willingness to consider theoretical ideas and areas of research that have traditionally been taboo.

For example, we now find organizations of professional scientists who openly study phenomena lying on the edge between physical science and the realms of mysticism and the paranormal. Examples are the International Association for New Science (IANS), the Society for Scientific Exploration (SSE), the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS), and the International Society for the Study of Subtle Energies and Energy Medicine (ISSSEEM). These all sponsor regular scientific conferences.

Some of the phenomena these groups study seem similar to the "mythical" phenomena so often reported in old religious texts and in recent accounts of religious experiences. A synergistic interaction between scholars of religion and these new scientific organizations might prove to be a valuable source of new insights for both groups of researchers.

The Direct Presentation of Vaishnava Teachings

We have discussed how Bhaktivinoda Thakura found it necessary to present a modified version of the Vaishnava teachings to young Bengali intellectuals at the high noon of British political and ideological imperialism. But as the sun began to set on the British empire, his son and successor Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati began a vigorous program of directly presenting the Vaishnava conclusions throughout India. This program was taken abroad by his disciple Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, who boldly celebrated the ancient Ratha-yatra festival of Jagannatha Puri in London's Trafalgar Square.

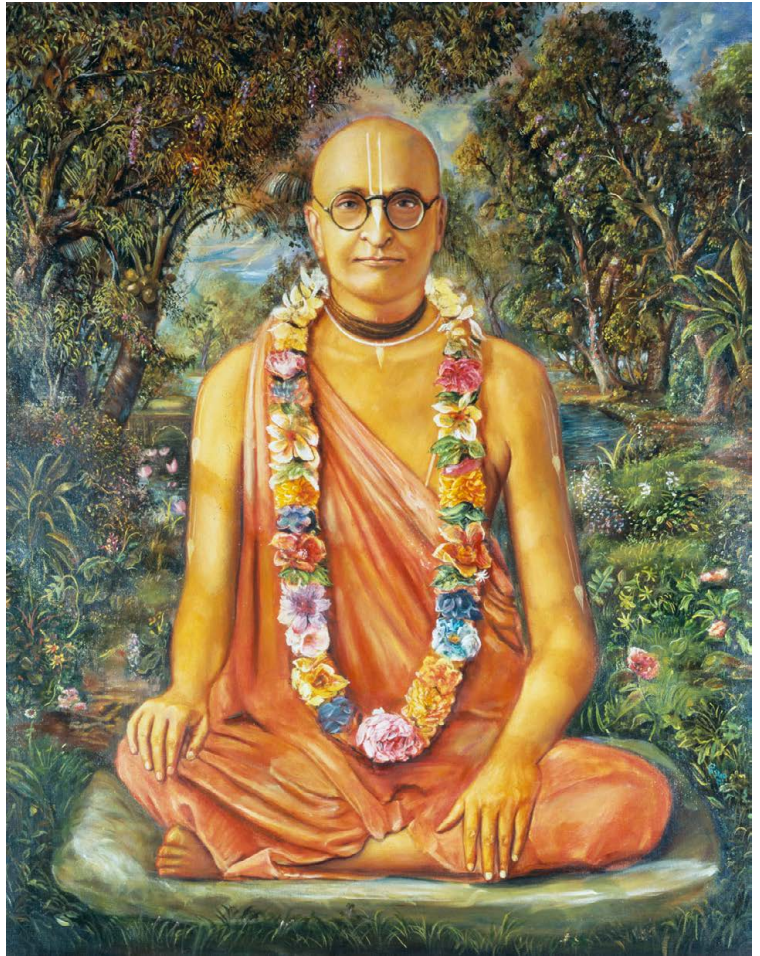
In the changing climate of scientific opinion in the late twentieth century, the time may have come to openly introduce

the traditional teachings of *bhakti* to the world's intellectual communities. The once jarring conflicts between rationalism and traditional religion may progressively fade as science matures and becomes open to the study of mystical phenomena. This opens up the possibility of an approach to religion that is intellectually acceptable and at the same time satisfies the soul's inner desire for love in a transcendental relationship.

This leaves us with one possible objection. Could it be that the Vaishnava teachings, with their specific emphasis on Krishna as the Supreme, are guilty of sectarian disregard for other religious traditions? The answer is that, of course, any doctrine can be put forward in a narrow, sectarian way. But as Bhaktivinoda Thakura pointed out in his essay on the *Bhagavata*, the Vaishnava teachings are inherently broad-minded and acknowledge the value of all religious systems.

The following prayer shows the approach to other religions taken in the *Bhagavata*:

O my Lord, Your devotees can see You through the ears by the process of bona fide hearing, and thus their hearts become cleansed, and You take Your seat there. You are so merciful to Your devotees that You manifest Yourself in the particular eternal form of transcendence in which they always think of You.



Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati

This verse states that God appears to His devoted worshipers in many different forms, depending on their desires. These forms include the *avatars* of Krishna described in traditional Vaishnava texts, but are not limited to those forms. Indeed, it is said that the expansions of the Supreme Personality of Godhead are uncountable, and they cannot be fully described in the finite scriptures of any one religious community.

The following verse gives some idea of the different religious communities in the universe, as described by the *Bhagavata*:

From the forefathers headed by Bhrgu Muni and other sons of Brahma appeared many children and descendants, who assumed different forms as demigods, demons, human beings, Guhyakas, Siddhas, Gandharvas, Vidyadharas, Charanas, Kindevas, Kinnaras, Nagas, Kimpurusas, and so on. All of the many universal species, along with their respective leaders, appeared with different natures and desires generated from the three modes of material nature. Therefore, because of the different characteristics of the living entities within the universe, there are a great many Vedic rituals, mantras, and rewards.

This statement is explicitly "mythological," and one can well imagine how Sir William Jones might have reacted to it. But it offers a grand picture of countless races and societies within the universe, all given religious methods suitable for their particular natures. Here the word "Vedic" cannot be limited to particular Sanskrit texts that now exist in India. Rather, it refers to the sum total of religious systems revealed by the infinite Supreme God for the sake of elevating countless societies of divinely created beings.

As always, the distinguishing feature of the Vaishnava teachings is that God is a real person and His variegated creation is also real. Thus the Vaishnava approach to religious liberality is to regard all genuine religions as real divine revelations. Likewise, the Vaishnava teachings of love of God aim to set in place a relationship of loving service between the real individual soul and the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the performer of real transcendental pastimes. 🌸

City handcrafted by the Pallavas

Thirukadalmallai Sthalashayana Perumal Temple

by Sampatkumara Ramanuja Dasan (Adv. Ashwin.S)

Located in the iconic ancient port town of Mahabalipuram near Chennai, is the magnificent temple of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Sri Sthalashayana Perumal.

The Legend

It is customary to discuss at length about the great devotees who are associated with a temple, for the Lord loves the glorification of devotees more than His own glorification. The whole aim of human life is to please the Supreme Lord Sri Krishna and do as He wills.

The pastime of this temple is close associated with Sri Pundarika Muni. We shall take a peep into his reference in the *Puranas* and *Ithihasas*:

War between humans and *asuras* was a common occurrence. The great Prince Karnakashyapa was once renowned for killing *asuras*. His empire stretched from the great mountains in the north to the vast sea towards the south, and from the edge of the desert in the west to the edge of the Kamarupa (Assam) kingdom in the east. He had fought great battles on every terrain, in every climate, against every enemy who existed in the veritable vastness of Bharatha.

Then, at the peak of the glory of his kingdom, Prince Karnakashyapa fell in love with a saffron-robed maiden

known as Pallavi, daughter of Rishi Pundarika. Rishi or Maharishi, Devarishi or Brahmharishi were titles awarded to only the most accomplished and wise sages in Bharathavarsha. Many great sages spent their entire lives practising a strict lifestyle of meditation and austerity, but only few earned those titles. Needless to say, a rishi had unquestionable social and spiritual authority, even over kings and emperors. His word had to be obeyed, no questions asked, even by an emperor.

Pallavi loved Karnakashyapa too. She didn't hesitate in telling him, when he expressed his desire to marry her. But for them to be married, her father's permission was most essential. So Karnakashyapa arranged for a great royal procession, carrying exotic gifts from lands far away, to impress the great sage, Rishi Pundarika. The prince arrived on a magnificent white horse to ask for Pallavi's hand, dressed in his ceremonial silks and gold ornaments.

When Rishi Pundarika saw Prince Karnakashyapa and his entourage, he laughed and said, "Why, dear prince Karnakashyapa, do you seek to impress by offering that which doesn't belong to you?"

Before the prince could think of an answer, the rishi continued, "I know your purpose behind visiting me like

The temple of Thirukadalmallai



this. But if you want my permission to marry my daughter, you cannot remain a *kshatriya*, you have to be a *brahmana*."

Prince Karnakashyapa had never backed down from a challenge, and he wasn't going to start then. He dismounted his horse, threw his elegant robe on the ground, and faced Rishi Pundarika.

"If those are your terms," the prince said, "then I shall relinquish all my rights upon my kingdom and positions. I shall be a *kshatriya* no more and shall give up war forever. I shall tread the path of renunciation and be rid of all worldly possessions. Would this be acceptable for you to let me marry Pallavi?"

"This is not a battle that you can win with bravery and willpower alone, Karnakashyapa," Rishi Pundarika said. "Even amongst the *brahmanas*, my daughter is an elite. She is the only daughter of a rishi. She has naturally inherited my yogic powers and my spiritual accomplishments. She is also a rishi amongst sages and must marry someone who is her equal. If you want to marry Pallavi, you must be declared a Maharishi by Lord Shiva."

The proclamation swept the earth from below Karnakashyapa's feet. If "Rishi" was a title awarded to one in a million sages, "Maharishi" was a title awarded to one in a million Rishi sages. A handful of Maharishi sages appeared in an era, and sometimes eras passed without a single sage being granted the title Maharishi.

Only a handful of *kshatriyas* had ever become Maharishis. The legendary King, Vishwamitra, for example. And it took him a thousand years of meditation to achieve that title.

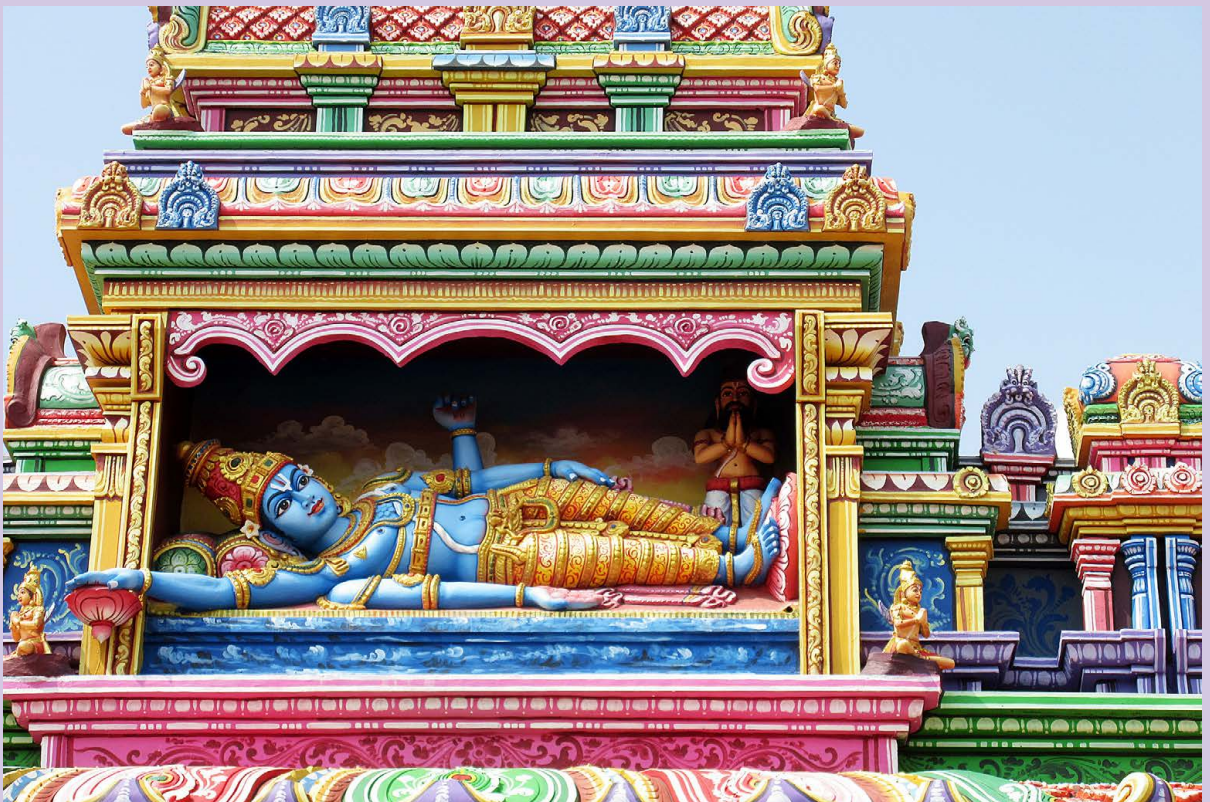
But Karnakashyapa had made up his mind. The love of his life was standing behind the rishi, looking at him, smiling. The prince smiled too.

"Then it is decided," Karnakashyapa declared. "I shall meditate and become a Maharishi anointed by Shiva. Then I shall marry your daughter, Rishi Pundarika. That is my vow."

The prince motioned his procession to leave and turned to walk away in a separate direction. "I shall wait for Karnakashyapa to come back as a Maharishi," Pallavi's voice followed him. "I'll wait for as many lifetimes as it takes. That is my vow."

Many years had passed since that vow was made. Karnakashyapa had turned from a young hot-blooded teenage *kshatriya* into a mendicant lost in meditation. His silver beard was impossible to differentiate from his hair, his body shrunk, his ribs protruded and he stood motionless like a statue. Seasons, animals, *asuras*, even *devatas* had tried very hard to stop his meditation, but he had stayed as unwavering as his vow. Pallavi was lost in meditation somewhere else, keeping herself alive through yogic powers alone.

Rishi Karnakashyapa's yogic powers protected the forest from intruders. Like an invisible power of penance, it



Stucco, the replica of the main Deity of the temple



The festival Deity of Sthalashayana Perumal

surrounded the forest's fringes. The first few years had been hard; Karnakashyapa had no idea how to become a mendicant and he had no teacher. He spent many years as a disciple of several sages, but he soon realized that it was fruitless. His goal lay far beyond the capability of normal mendicants. It was a path that he would have to figure out alone.

On the solitary path, Karnakashyapa experienced an awakening of spiritual powers inside him. When he finally found a suitable place to perform meditation, he decided to make it safe for the animals and birds sharing the place with him. Penance and kindness had been Vishwamitra's allies in his quest to become a Maharishi

and Karnakashyapa believed that the same path would lead him to his goal.

Thus a thousand years passed.

A never-ending eternity of subjecting himself to complete detachment was finally over, when a deep voice projected in his mind, "Open your eyes, son. I am here!"

Karnakashyapa opened his eyes very slowly, not giving in to joy and surprise. A pleasant expression was written over his face as he greeted the lord he had waited so long for.

"What took you so long to come here?" he asked.



The Lord of Thirukadalmallai



The Mahalakshmi, known affectionately as Nilamangai Thayar

"I came here as fast as I could, son," was the response. "What took you so long to call me?"

Lord Shiva. He spends most of his time meditating and granting boons to humans, *asuras*, anyone who meditated hard enough. Sometimes he had been criticized for granting boons too often and too thoughtlessly, but it was common knowledge that he was an excellent judge of character. Within moments of appearing before Karnakashyapa, Lord Shiva proved yet again by pointing towards the last shred of pride that the *kshatriya* sage had. Karnakashyapa folded his hands humbly, praising Lord Shiva.

"You have shown tremendous patience and humility in your meditation," Shiva said. "I am impressed with you. You may ask me for any boon, except immortality, and it shall be granted."

"You already know what I want, O great one," said Karnakashyapa.

"I do," Shiva said, "but I want to hear the words come out of your mouth. That is the way boons work. You need to ask for them."

Shiva looked exactly like the scriptures described. His dazzling smile was captivating, but it also conveyed how mystical the gods are.

Karnakashyapa knew exactly what he wanted - to become a Maharishi, marry Pallavi, and live his life with her. But for that to happen, he needed to ask Shiva to

revert him and Pallavi to their youth. Fortunately, it was allowed to add as many clauses in a boon as the person requesting it wished for. He wanted the Maharishi title and youth for himself and his beloved. Karnakashyapa had memorised the words in his head thousands of times, even before he had started meditation.

But before he could open his mouth to request, a stream of thunder passed over his head and culminated in an explosion nearby. It wasn't visible from where he was, but Karnakashyapa had spent enough time in the forest to know where exactly the explosion had occurred.

"It must be a remnant of a clash between demonic weapons," he said. "There is a hill where the thunder struck. I should check if any animals have been injured because of it."

"Go freely, son," Shiva said. "You waited a thousand years for me. I can wait a few moments for you. Come, I will walk with you."

And so, accompanied by Lord Shiva, Karnakashyapa reached the foot of the hill. Upon seeing the place, he was baffled.

"What is this?"

The surface of the hill had been eroded away by the blast, revealing some kind of a glacier inside. In the glacier, there were a few tiny human forms frozen in place. Little children, mummified in ice.

"These children were born well before your time," Shiva

said. "Unfortunately, they were forced to sacrifice their lives in order to save the world from imminent destruction."

"Sacrifice their lives?" Karnakashyapa asked, "Do you mean they are all dead?"

"Not yet," Shiva said. "They have been asleep all this time, buried in the hill. But now that the hill is gone, their life is eroding away fast."

"Can you save them?" Karnakashyapa knew the answer but still asked.

"Of course I can," Shiva said. "But I don't intervene in the affairs of the mortal world, except under some special circumstances."

"Special circumstances?" Karnakashyapa smiled, "Like a boon, for example?"

Neither sage nor Shiva spoke for a long moment. Karnakashyapa knew the dilemma he had been put in. Shiva knew what Karnakashyapa was thinking.

"You must ask for your boon now," Shiva finally said. "Your beloved is dying, I know you can sense that. Meditation has kept her alive far longer than a human is supposed to live. She will not survive the end of this hour."

"Then hear me, O Shiva," Karnakashyapa spoke. "By the grace of your power and my devotion to you, I wish for this: Let these innocent children be free from their ice prison. Let them be returned to the life that they deserved but never got. Let this ice melt and the inhabitants inside be granted a long and healthy life."



The depiction of the pastime of the Lord of Mahabalipuram



The rajagopuram of the temple constructed by the Pallavas

That is the boon that I wish for."

"So be it!" Shiva said, raising his right palm. "This ice will melt and these children will come out unharmed, like waking up from a deep slumber."

Karnakashyapa collapsed on the ground as soon as the words left Shiva's lips. His yogic powers had been exhausted, and death had finally caught up with him. But before his final breath left him, Shiva spoke to him one last time.

"Karnakashyapa, my child, you are a true Maharishi!"

Rishi Pundarika instructed the most important aspect: that material gains cannot give us salvation and only spiritual practices can.

After the departure of Maharshi Karnakashyapa, Rishi Pundarika came down to the shore of Mahabalipuram and started a severe penance worshipping Vishnu. He would collect lotus flowers and offer these to the one whom he worshipped, in the form of the Lord on the milk ocean. He collected 1008 flowers and in his intensity, he scooped out water also in full. The Supreme Lord appeared before Karnakashyapa, disguised as a sage when he asked Him for food. The rishi returned with food for the old person, he found the Supreme Lord standing at the spot. Since Vishnu stayed in this place, he was called Sthalashayana Perumal.

(To be continued) ☺

Photo courtesy: Kesavabhasyam

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Ashva Vahana

Chandra Prabha Vahana



Sri Brahmotsava



Kalpa Vriksha Vahana

Surya Prabha Vahana



Garuda Vahana



Hamsa Vahana

Sri Brahmotsava

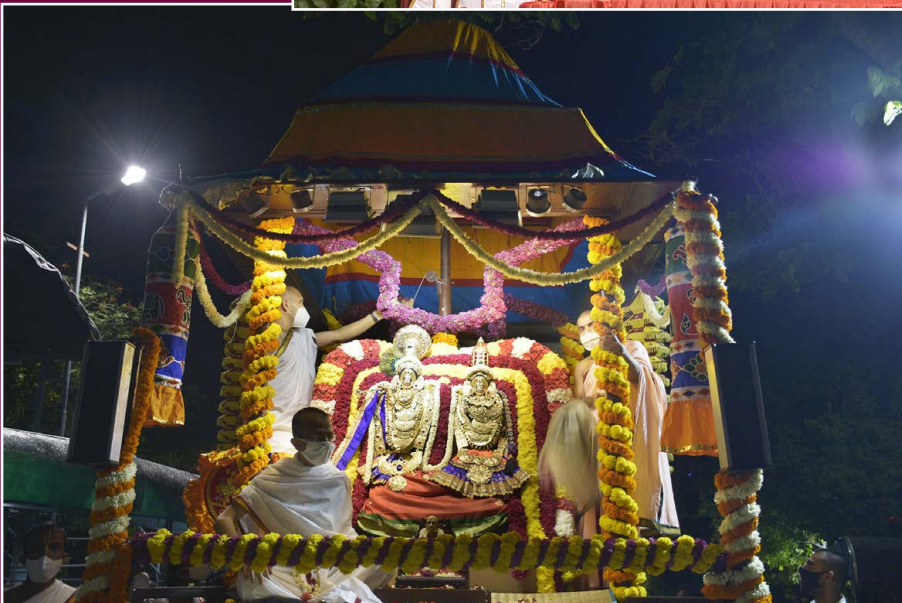
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Maha Pallakki



Gaja Vahana



Brahma Ratha

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Abhisheka



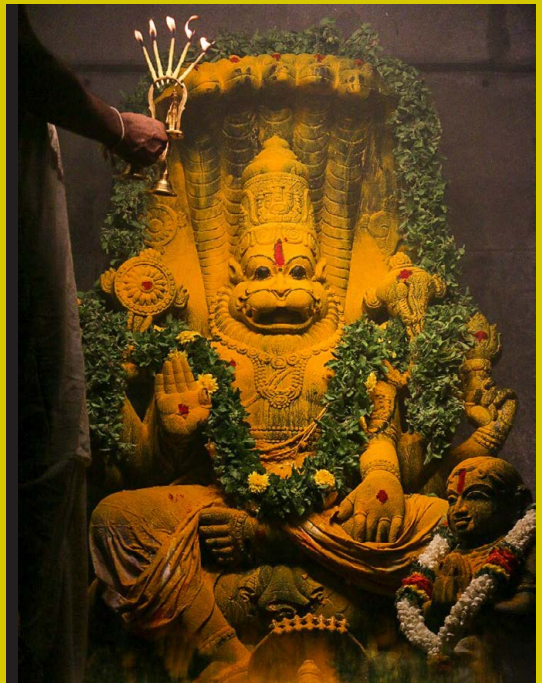
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Alankara



Morning abhisheka



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