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Two Faces of Krsna

To those who refuse to love His smiling, gentle form,
Krsna shows another . . .

by Suhotra dasa

Early one morning in April 1945, a housewife was driving along a lonely deserted road near Alamogordo, New Mexico. Suddenly she saw a brilliant red glare light up the horizon. "It looked as if the sun popped up for a second and then went back down," she said later. The light was followed by a rumbling roar that echoed across the desert landscape.

A few miles away, Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer saw the same brilliant flash of light from the shelter of a top-secret United States Army observation bunker. That light, so bright that it seemed momentarily to rival the sun, was the world's first atomic explosion, the result of nearly five years of frantic scientific development first commissioned by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt just prior to America's entry into the Second World War. This first bomb was tiny by today's standards, yet it almost totally vaporized the 100-foot-high steel tower supporting it and turned a vast tract of sandy desert floor to glass.

The awesome release of atomic might early that spring morning near Alamogordo moved Dr. Oppenheimer, the chief scientist of the project and a dabbler in Eastern philosophy, to quote from *Bhagavad-gita* (11.32): "Time I am, destroyer of worlds." These were Lord Krsna's words to His personal friend and devotee Arjuna, who had been filled with awe upon seeing the Lord's *visva-rupa*, His all-powerful universal form. Arjuna had cried aloud, "O all-pervading Visnu [Krsna]! I can no longer maintain my equilibrium! Seeing Your radiant colors fill the skies and beholding Your eyes and mouths, I am afraid." Lord Krsna had revealed to Arjuna a side of Himself that Arjuna had never considered before: His terrible feature as irresistible time, which ultimately devours the entire universe.

Most of us, if we believe in God at all, do not like to identify Him with the destructive face of nature. Our natural tendency is to pray to God for shelter from destruction. "After all," we reason, "God is love. He created the world for our enjoyment, and if any danger arises we should pray to Him to preserve our existence here."

But if God is the single prime mover behind this manifest existence. He must also be its destroyer. If He is actually all-powerful, then He can't be rivaled by some separate destroyer who comes along like the proverbial bully at the beach to kick down what God has wrought.

Krsna's purpose for revealing the universal form was to convince Arjuna (and us) that He has no rival in creation, and that His will must be executed. Now, Arjuna wasn't an ordinary person praying to God for the preservation of his meager sense enjoyment in this temporary world of birth and death. He was a devotee of Krsna in the spiritual relationship called *sakhya-rati*, or friendly exchange. On the Battlefield of Kuruksetra, where Krsna spoke *Bhagavad-gita*, Arjuna was blinded by his friendship with Krsna and forgot for a few moments that He was in fact God Almighty, who had personally arranged for the vast destruction to come when the battle would take place. So Krsna showed Arjuna His fearsome side as *kala*, or time, just to remind His dear friend of His real position as the creator, maintainer, and destroyer of everything in the material world.

But Krsna's aim was not to frighten Arjuna into submission. Krsna's real purpose was to clearly demonstrate Arjuna's auspicious position as the Lord's dear friend. Only Arjuna and his four brothers, all intimate devotees of the Lord, would survive the battle and fulfill Krsna's purpose in the world. All others on the field of battle would perish. Thus the most confidential secret Krsna conveyed to Arjuna in *Bhagavad-gita* is that a devotee who is completely surrendered to the will of God need fear no adversity, for in every case the Lord directly guides the destiny of such a devotee. Even the moment of death holds no fear for a pure devotee, for he knows that Krsna has simply come to take him from the material world back to the spiritual world, where he will eternally serve and love Krsna in a personal relationship. "O son of Kunti," Krsna tells Arjuna in the Ninth Chapter, "declare it boldly that My devotee never perishes."

Materialists, however, must always fear God in His feature of all-devouring time, for they lack spiritual knowledge and thus identify their total existence with their own temporary bodies and those of their family, friends, and countrymen. To the materialistic non-devotee, God may be "a force" or "a provider," but never a personal friend. Such crippled theistic conceptions sometimes lead one to follow a religion based on fear of God, in which He is seen as the awesome authority behind the benedictions of Mother Nature, as the authority who must be obeyed to insure continued prosperity.

Yet "time marches on," bringing continuous death, destruction, and renewal. Despite our prayers and best wishes for the good health of friends and relatives, we must watch them die off one by one, until death comes at last to claim us too. Where we go from there depends on our *karma*. But one thing is certain: if we haven't developed a personal relationship with Krsna, we shall surely *not* go to Him. Instead, we shall continue suffering the ravages of time—birth, old age, disease, and death—somewhere in the material world.

So there doesn't seem to be much value in a religion based upon the preservation of one's bodily identity. And in fact this is precisely Krsna's message to Arjuna in

Bhagavad-gita. "Engage your mind always in thinking of Me and become My devotee," He says. "Offer your obeisances to Me and worship Me. Being completely absorbed in Me, surely you will come to Me" (Bg. 9.34). In other words, Krsna is saying that we should worship Him in a personal way, with the idea of reviving our eternal relationship with Him. We shouldn't divert religion into the service of our petty sense enjoyment, which ends with the inevitable death of the body. When we develop an eternal loving relationship with Krsna, one that absorbs all our attention, we go to Krsna at the time of death and there attain shelter at the Lord's lotus feet. The price of deathlessness—of complete safety from all-devouring time—is *love* of God.

Krsna wants our *love*. Loving our temporary bodies and fearing God for taking them away from us can't save us from birth and death, any more than a car thief's fear of the owner can save him from arrest and prosecution. Love means being attached to a person for himself, not for his wealth and possessions. Attachment to things that don't belong to us brings us only fear and anger when the owner comes to reclaim them. Therefore Krsna says, "Being free from attachment, fear, and anger, being fully absorbed in Me and taking refuge in me, many, many persons in the past became purified by knowledge of Me—and thus they all attained transcendental love for Me" (Bg. 4.10).

Yet most people remain stubbornly attached to the bodily conception of life, refusing to surrender to Lord Krsna and often reacting with fear and anger toward His devotees, who *do* surrender everything to Him. Some people even accuse the devotees of being "fanatical cultists" and urge them to return to "the real world." Not caring for Lord Krsna's desires, such inveterate materialists concoct various conceptions of proper duty based on nationalism, communism, capitalism, and the like. But because these ideas rest on ignorance of man's real spiritual identity and his relationship to God, they always result in sinful activities, such as widespread animal slaughter and abortion. Thus men by their own foolishness insure victimization at the hands of time. Not only will they be cut down unceremoniously in the midst of their plan-making, but they will also have to spend more time in the material world, suffering in hellish, nonhuman species.

Our "real world" is rapidly becoming a dangerous place in which to live. Not that it wasn't always so, but the danger is becoming more and more obvious every day as human culture becomes progressively more depraved. Since the manifestation of Lord Krsna's time factor as the twenty-kiloton bomb at Alamogordo, the potential for nuclear destruction on this planet has multiplied beyond human conception. The United States now has 7,192 strategic nuclear warheads aimed at the Soviet Union, each thousands of times more powerful than the Alamogordo bomb. The Soviet Union has 6,302 similar warheads aimed at the United States and its allies. And to further "insure peace," President Reagan has ordered the deployment of two hundred new MX "high-survivability" missiles, which will undoubtedly spur the Russians to develop even more sophisticated weapons. By late 1983 the United States plans to have 572 cruise missiles and medium-range Pershing-2 rockets in Western Europe, adding to an already prodigious nuclear arsenal of more than 5,000 NATO warheads stockpiled there. As the "nuclear club" grows and the materials and knowledge needed to build nuclear weapons proliferate, the danger of strategic miscalculation, human or mechanical accident, and

nuclear terrorism increases. The "balance of terror" grows ever more precarious. At any time the long-feared nuclear holocaust could become a reality.

Krsna has two faces: His smiling face of love for those who surrender to Him, and His fearsome face of the universal form, "whose effulgence is like the radiance of a thousand suns bursting forth at once in the sky." Lord Krsna reserves this face of all-devouring, devastating time for those who fear or deride or ignore Him, and who desire simply to exploit His creation for their own ends. Should *that* face manifest itself in the world, we can only hope that the people for whom it is meant will remember Krsna then.