

1995 Vyasa Puja Homage to Srila Prabhupada by Suhotra Swami

nama om visnu-padaya krsna-presthaya bhu-tale
srimate bhaktivedanta-svamin iti namine

I offer my respectful obeisances unto His Divine Grace A.C.
Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, who is very dear to Lord Krsna, having
taken shelter at His lotus feet.

namas te sarasvate deve gaura-vani-pracarine
nirvisesa-sunyavadi-pascatya-desatarine

Our respectful obeisances are unto you, O spiritual master, servant of
Sarasvati Gosvami. You are kindly preaching the message of Lord
Caitanyadeva and delivering the Western countries, which are filled
with impersonalism and voidism.

Dear Srila Prabhupada, in Srimad-Bhagavatam 8.20.21p you write as
follows.

"Sometimes we see a devotee offering Ganges water to the Ganges. After
taking his bath in the Ganges, a devotee takes a palmful of water and
offers it back to the Ganges. Actually, when one takes a palmful of
water from the Ganges, the Ganges does not lose anything, and similarly
if a devotee offers a palmful of water to the Ganges, the Ganges does
not increase in any way. But by such an offering, the devotee becomes
celebrated as a devotee of mother Ganges. Similarly, when we offer
anything with devotion and faith, what we offer does not belong to us,
nor does it enrich the opulence of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.
But if one offers whatever he has in his possession, he becomes a
recognized devotee."

All I have in my possession is the sublime knowledge you have given me.
In the same way that a palmful of Ganges water is offered to the
Ganges, I shall attempt to offer a palmful of knowledge into the ocean
of philosophical truth that is Your Divine Grace with this homage. It
is based upon a room conversation you had with a German man and a
professor in Mexico City, January, 1975, edited for brevity's sake.
According to my palmful of realization, which is only by your mercy,
I've made notes on certain points.

The topic under discussion is, Why is there anything?

Guest (1) (German Man):

I would like to ask you a question. Once Leibnitz, who is one
of the fathers of the Western tradition, formulated the question which

was the beginning of metaphysics in a way, Western metaphysics. The question is "Why there is anything?" What is your stand about this classic point?

Note: According to G. W. Leibnitz (1646-1716), the "why" of anything cannot be discerned by studying anything, because the things of this world do not contain in themselves the reason for their existence. The reason for anything is to be found in the being that does contain the reason for its own existence i.e., the Necessary Being, God. The complete reason for anything is knowable to the mind of God, not to the mind of man. Therefore, God's mind is perfect. But Leibnitz's argument for God's perfection does not proceed further, from the cosmological to the transcendental. He posits God's mind as nothing more than a mirror of this imperfect cosmos. He pleads that the perfection of the cosmos is that it is mirrored in the perfect mind of God. This perfection is to be approached through abstract mathematics. Leibnitz's attempt to answer the question "why?" leads to further "whys?". We shall see why in a moment.

Prabhupada: (chuckles)

"Why anything exists?" (laughter) What do you mean by anything?

Guest (1):

Well, that's precisely the point. What is the purpose? What is the sense, if there is any, or does the very question make sense?

Prabhupada:

No, no, unless understand what is that "anything..." First of all, you have to understand what is that "anything." Anything... Just like this book, this table, this bell, the electric they are so many things. So you can take any one of them; that is anything. What is your idea of anything?

Note: His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, in these few matter-of-fact sentences, calls attention to a grave shortcoming in Leibnitz's approach to philosophy. A passage from a textbook explains: "...Leibnitz's logical doctrine ... remains a logical doctrine with no bearing on the nature of what there is in the world." Leibnitz believed that the mind is not functionally connected to the world of matter. Mind and matter are two chains of events initiated by God, working independently of one other. His "reason for anything" is simply the mathematical harmony of these two chains of events. Such a "reason why" does not pertain to anything as described by words like book, table, or bell. Therefore it cannot answer questions about the purpose of the objects of our perception. Sense objects are precisely the "anything" that we know.

Guest (1):

Oh, reality. Material, external, reality to our ego, our internal reality as well.

Prabhupada:

Internal reality and external reality?

Guest (1):

Both. For me, the word "anything" covers both.

Prabhupada:

Yes. So that also we understand, "anything." There are so many varieties of things, and you can take any one of them. That is "anything." But your question should be, "Wherefrom these things coming?" That should be the proper question.

Professor:

What is the reason of this (indistinct) "anything"?

Prabhupada:

Yes. There are so many things, and you can take any one of them. That is "anything." But the real question should be "Wherefrom all these things are coming?" That is real question, "What is the origin of all these things?"

Note: In Bhag. 11.22.34, the attempt to establish by argument the reality and unreality of the things of this world is condemned by Lord Krsna as useless, though thinkers who are not Krsna conscious are unable to give it up. Leibnitz argued that the reality of "anything" is an abstract state of calculation in harmony with calculations about any and all other things. Apart from this, "nothing" is real. But this is only one of many ways to think about "anything" and "nothing." Perhaps "nothing" really exists out there, and "anything" that we think is real is just a creation of deluded perception and speculation. Or perhaps "anything" is real, with "nothing" dependent upon our power of perception and thought. These arguments are as endless as they are useless. Therefore Srila Prabhupada turns the guest's attention to a different concern, which Western thinkers frame with the word "teleology." The teleological argument asserts that an intelligent comprehension of the things of the cosmos requires the acknowledgment of an intelligent origin of everything.

Guest (1):

Well, origin, that is more on the theoretical side. It's a question, "Why?" But I am, rather, after the purpose.

Note: The guest has not yet grasped the significance of Srila Prabhupada's reply. The word teleology is built upon the Greek root telos, which means purpose, goal or end. Teleology is precisely knowledge of the purpose of anything, which the guest claims he is after. The purpose of anything is known in the intent of its creator.

Prabhupada:

Yes. That is a nice question. But there is the real source of everything. That is the Vedanta-sutra... Perhaps you have read. Vedanta-sutra, first question is: "Wherefrom all these things come?" So the answer is that janmadyasya yatah: "Brahman. The original thing is Brahman, or the Absolute Truth, and from Him, everything is emanating."

Note: Srila Prabhupada's phrase, "there is the real source of everything," is most significant. The real source can only be Brahman, the unchanging Sat. Nasato vidyate bhavo: that which does not endure (the material world) is asat or unreal, and therefore cannot be the real cause of anything. Real philosophy must identify that origin (adi) which is eternal and unchanging. "So science, philosophy means to find out the ultimate cause of everything. That we are getting from the sastras, Vedic literature, that Krsna is the cause of all causes." (SP 21 August 1973 in London)

Prabhupada:

Just like physical... The sun is there, and whole material world is product of the sunshine. What your physical science says? Eh? Eh? Do they not say? It is a fact that sunshine... Due to the sunshine all these material things are there.

Guest (1):

Well, it's more involved than just saying that...about the meaning of celestial bodies and the meaning of, in particular, of sun and moon and so on...We can't see, assuming all the glory of that what happens on the earth due to the existence of those bodies, we do not try to look inside of the structure of these things, as something meant for us. Just universe as it is... And this question, like Nietzschean question which I am repeating--that's not my point--this big question is... Rarely, directly, we hear the direct answer to that.

Note: The guest doesn't complete his thought about the "Nietzschean question." It seems he is referring to Nietzsche's calling into question the idea that the things of the world have an innate human-

centered reason or truth to them. In the Will to Power, Nietzsche argued that the world is "as a falsehood always changing but never getting near the truth: for there is no 'truth'." To Nietzsche, the world is untrue because the world separates humankind from reason, the way a veil separates the face of a woman from the eyes of a man. Yet he wondered (in *The Joyful Wisdom*) if there is truth in this very veiling of the truth: "Perhaps truth is a woman who has reasons for not showing her reasons?" Not knowing that this feminine tattva is Krsna's sakti, Nietzsche could not know her telos or true purpose: devotional service to Krsna. She serves Krsna by veiling the truth of the Lord and His energies from the eyes of the nondevotees, and lifting the veil of Maya from the eyes of the devotees.

Professor:

If Indian philosophy...

Prabhupada:

No, no, it is no Indian or American. It is the philosophy. It is philosophy. The philosophy is not Indian or American. Truth is truth, not Indian truth or American truth. That is not truth. That is relative truth. The Absolute Truth is absolute. That is neither Indian nor American.

Note: As noted before, real philosophy concerns itself with the intelligent origin (adi) of everything, not with speculative arguments over what is real and not real about anything. All Western philosophy began with Greek philosophy. Greek philosophy began as a dispute between those who argued that the arche or origin is chaos, and those who argued it is logos. Today, Western materialists still posit chaos as the origin of everything. They shift the sense of the word chaos away from that of the original Greek, so as to mean a state of disorder and unreason, or a void. But the original sense of chaos is better reflected in the English word chasm: a gap. Chaos is the "gap between," just as pradhana is the unmanifest between the spiritual and the material manifestations in Vedanta philosophy. Pradhana is unconscious and is represented in the state of dreamless sleep called susupti. Similarly, in Hesiod's *Theogony*, night, sleep and death are said to represent chaos. Logos has two senses: meaningful sound (this sense of logos is evident in the word "dialogue"), and reasonable thought (as evident in the word "logic"). In Vedanta philosophy, creation is the order brought to pradhana by the thoughts of Maha-Visnu transmitted by sabda, Vedic sound. ("This material world is created by the dreaming of Maha-Visnu." --Bhag. 4.29.83p; "The material energy is coming through the breathing of Maha-Visnu, who is lying down in the Karana, Causal Ocean. So, from the breathing there is sound." --SP Bg lecture, 19 Feb. '74 in Bombay.) The idea that intelligent logos is the arche or origin is an ancient Greek attempt at "real philosophy," Vedanta. The opposing idea that everything originates from

unintelligent chaos resembles atheistic Sankhya philosophy.

Guest (1):

But in what sense you use the concept "truth" here? Is it in the ontological sense, or is it in somehow in a more pragmatical human sense, refers to human beings or...?

Prabhupada:

Yes, it is pragmatic, that you cannot see beyond this wall. That is your insufficient knowledge or your senses are insufficient. You cannot go beyond this wall. But that does not mean there is nothing beyond this wall. So if you want to know what is beyond this wall, you have to know from a person who knows it. Yes. Because you cannot see, you cannot know, that is not the end. There must be something.

Note: Pragmatism is a doctrine that favors "value" over abstract "truth." The value of anything is the effect it has on the conduct of life. Pragmatic evaluation of anything supports regular conduct of life, expressed as the Greek *prassein*, "to do (habitually)," from which the word pragmatic is derived. Nietzsche summed up his view of pragmatism in these quotes from Thus Spake Zarathustra. "Many lands saw Zarathustra, and many peoples: thus he discovered the good and the bad of many peoples ... Much that passed for good with one people was regarded with scorn and contempt by another ... Much here called bad was there decked with purple honors." In other words, the values of pragmatism, being human-centered, are inherently relative. In Vedanta philosophy, regular conduct of life means the religious rites prescribed in the Vedas. The Vedas are *apauruseya*, not conceived by human beings. Therefore the sacrificial duties given therein are called *setu*, "the bridge" between the relative world and the transcendental world. As Lord Krsna explains in Bg 4.33, *sarvam karmakhilam partha jnane parisamapyate*, "All sacrifices of work culminate in transcendental knowledge." Now a new doubt arises. Transcendental knowledge awaits us on the other side of the bridge of Vedic dharma. Still, while on this side, we must know and embrace the values that support that bridge. Otherwise how can we, who are now in complete ignorance, value the crossing of that bridge? As Srila Prabhupada said to the guest, "it is pragmatic, that you cannot see beyond this wall. That is your insufficient knowledge or your senses are insufficient." Prabhupada gives a transcendentially pragmatic solution to the problem of humanistic pragmatism: "If you want to know what is beyond this wall, you have to know from a person who knows it." Krsna similarly declares in Bg 4.34 that the knowledge of the transcendental goal of prescribed duties is given the *tattva-darsi*. Because the *tattva-darsi* sees the truth, he can lead the conditioned soul across the bridge of the Vedas.

Professor:

But in the case of a mystical man that has been able to see...

Prabhupada:

There is no question of mystic. First of all we have to admit that on account of our senses being imperfect, whatever knowledge we gather, that is imperfect. That is imperfect. Therefore, if you want to possess real knowledge you have to approach somebody who is perfect.

Note: Srila Prabhupada uses the word "mysticism" in different contexts. The context here, in which mysticism is rejected, is summed up in the following sentence from Bhag. 1.12.3p. "Ardent hearing from the bona fide master is the only way to receive transcendental knowledge, and there is no need for medical performances or occult mysticism for miraculous effects." The context in which mysticism is acceptable is seen next. "Vedanta is the last word in Vedic wisdom, and the author and knower of the Vedanta philosophy is Lord Krsna; and the highest Vedantist is the great soul who takes pleasure in chanting the holy name of the Lord. That is the ultimate purpose of all Vedic mysticism." (Bg 2.46p) The Vedic context of mysticism (raja-guhyam, the secret of all secrets) is explained by Lord Krsna in Bhagavad-gita 9.2. In Bg 9.1 He prefaces this explanation by reminding Arjuna: pravaksyami, "I am speaking." What Krsna speaks in Bhagavad-gita constitutes real mysticism, for He is Yogesvara, the master of all mystics.

Guest (1):

How can we know that somebody is perfect?

Prabhupada:

That is another thing. But first of all, the basic principle is we have to understand that our senses are imperfect, and whatever knowledge we gather by these imperfect senses, they are imperfect. So if we want perfect knowledge, then we have to approach somebody whose senses are perfect, whose knowledge is perfect. That is the principle. That is the Vedic principle.

Therefore the Vedic principle says, tad-vijnanartham sa gurum evabhigacchet. You know Sanskrit, yes. "In order to know that perfect knowledge, one should approach guru." So who is guru? Then the next question will be... Your question is that, "How I can?"

Professor:

Well, this is... We've only come to one of the mentioned theories of knowledge, I think, sabda.

Prabhupada:

Sabda, yes, sabda-brahman. Yes...Just like many thousands of miles away we are getting some radio message and we learn that "Something is happening there. Something is there." Therefore sabda. This is... Sabda means sound, sound, sound vibration. So that is the real source of knowledge. That is the real source of... Sabda-brahman.

Professor:

One of the sources of knowledge or the only one?

Prabhupada:

No, that is the only one. There are others; they are subordinate. But the sabda, knowledge received, sabda, through sabda, sabda-brahman, that is perfect knowledge. Just like the same example: beyond this wall I cannot see, but if somebody there says, "This is the position here"--the sound comes--that is perfect. You cannot see what is going on, but if somebody says, sends radio message or any message, sound, then you know. Therefore sabda-pramana, sabda, knowledge received through sabda, that is perfect knowledge. ... Direct perception. Sabda, you can (have) direct perception. It is not intuition. It is perception. ... So this is sabda-pramana, sabda-pramana, that "In the beginning there was God, nothing else." So in this way our Vedic principle is: when your knowledge is corroborated by the Vedic version then it is perfect.

Note: The word pramana in Sanskrit means "source of valid knowledge." Three kinds of pramana are accepted in the Brahma-Madhva-Gaudiya Sampradaya. These are sabda (spiritual sound), pratyaksa (sensory perception) and anumana (logical argument). The root of pramana is prama (cognition); therefore pramana is that by which the truth is ascertained. But the acaryas of our sampradaya hold that of the three pramanas, sabda alone is the best evidence because it alone reveals the truth that lies beyond material perception. Therefore Srila Prabhupada said, "that (sabda) is the only one. There are others; they are subordinate." Sensory perception (pratyaksa) and logic (anumana) help us only to understand the Vedic evidence in terms of our present condition. But they themselves are unable to reveal eternal truths. As Prabhupada said, "Sabda, you can (have) direct perception that in the beginning there was God, nothing else." Then in what way are sensory perception and logic accepted as evidence? In that with their help, Vedic knowledge can be demonstrated and confirmed. When employed skillfully, sensory perception and logic reinforce faith in the sabda-pramana (evidence of spiritual sound). Pratyaksa and anumana that do not support the sabda enunciated by the tattva-darsi are to be rejected.

Professor:

But why existence of all these things?

Prabhupada:

So? Why? Then the answer will be: "Why there shall not be existence?" First of all you answer this. If you question like that-- "Why there is existence?"--then I shall inquire, "Why there shall not be existence?" Therefore the decision should be taken from the Absolute. Your question, my answer, will not solve. If you say, "Why there is existence?" I can ask you, "Why there shall not be existence?" And who will decide this?

The purpose is... That is experienced by every one of us, what is the purpose of life, what is the purpose, anything. That, everyone, we can understand very easily. The purpose is ananda. Pleasure. That is the purpose. There is no difficulty to understand what is the purpose. The purpose is pleasure-seeking. Or purpose is pleasure. One who hasn't got the pleasure, he's seeking after it. That is the purpose. Purpose is ananda. Anandamayo 'bhyasat.

That is the Vedanta-sutra. Everyone of us, seeking ananda. The scientific knowledge, philosophy, or even driving the car or whatever you are doing--the purpose is ananda. That is a common factor. Purpose is... Why I am eating palatable dishes ? I can eat anything, but I am seeking that "This sort of foodstuff will please me." That is ananda.

Guest (1):

That is driving force and motivation of most human activities. But the question, purpose, which Leibnitz was asking for, he was asking on higher plane, in abstraction.

Prabhupada:

Higher plane means you are seeking after pleasure, but that is being obstructed. That is your position. You are seeking pleasure, but it is not unobstructed. Therefore you are seeking higher, where there is no obstruction. Pleasure is the purpose, but when you speak of higher plane, that means you are experiencing obstruction in getting pleasure. So you are seeking a platform where there is no obstruction. But the purpose is the same.

Note: As Srila Prabhupada so often said, "Variety is the mother of enjoyment." That is why anything and everything is displayed in this world. Unfortunately, the variety displayed on the lower or material plane of existence is "a falsehood always changing but never getting near the truth." Material variety is nirvisesa, without quality, because it is temporary. The varieties of this cosmos sooner or later collapse into chaos. Attempting to adjust consciousness to the

nirvivesa position by intellectual abstraction will not bring one to the higher plane. To ascend to the higher plane, the idea of "I am the original enjoyer" must be given up, not the idea of enjoyment itself. On the lower plane, the individual soul posits himself as the original enjoyer. But he is not original. The only obstruction to the soul's happiness is his failure to admit that because he is not the origin of the variety he is attracted to enjoy, he is not free to do as he likes. Krsna is the origin. Real enjoyment is therefore Krsna-centered. On the higher plane the soul achieves eternal enjoyment of the endless variety of Krsna's transcendental qualities.

Dear Srila Prabhupada, Lord Caitanya said to Prakasananda Sarasvati that the purpose of Vedanta philosophy is very difficult for an ordinary person to understand. But, ye sutra-karta, se yadi karaye vyakhyana tabe sutrera mula artha lokera haya jnana: if the person who wrote Vedanta-sutra explains it, its original meaning can be understood by the people in general. The intention of my offering is to establish that you, dear Srila Prabhupada, are the sutra-karta, Srila Vyasadeva, whom we worship on this holy day of your merciful appearance in this world. I know this is true because, though I am an ordinary fallen soul, by hearing your explanations of the Vedic scriptures a glimmer of attraction to real philosophy has taken root in my heart. Now I prostrate myself in the dust of your lotus feet and humbly submit before you on this Vyasa-puja day a request. As a wise man declared, "To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts; but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates." I pray for the benediction of such love for this wisdom impart by you throughout the world, for this wisdom is the Lord Himself (jnanam jneyam jnanagamya). Please instill this transcendental knowledge in my soul, thoughts, words and deeds, life after life. For then I may be sure to serve you with fixed attention, eternally.

Your ever insignificant, ever aspiring servant,

Suhotra Swami