

You are probably wondering, “What is this simple truth?”

There are many simple truths, but the one I will first tell you about is the simple truth Srila Prabhupada talked about the most: The simple truth is that although life is eternal, in this material world we change from one body to another. Foolish people, especially in this age, do not understand this simple truth.

We are born into this world and as we grow up we gradually become aware of our families, communities, and nations. We learn how society is organized and we are sent to school so that we can take part in it to the best of our ability. We try to use our talents and intelligence to position ourselves in the best possible way, and sometimes we stop to contemplate our existence. We study the workings of nature, but we cannot understand why we were born as human beings on this earth.

This small book will introduce you to the person who informed us of the sublime purpose of human life—His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the founder-acarya (spiritual master) of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), also known as the Hare Krishna Movement (Krishna is a Sanskrit name of God). I will simply refer to him as Srila Prabhupada, because that was how his disciples addressed him.

Srila Prabhupada was a singularly extraordinary person. I saw him many times, mostly in Calcutta. As he sat on his elevated seat to lecture, I would watch him intently, and this vision was always something mystical. Although seated in front of me, Srila Prabhupada seemed to be somehow situated far beyond Calcutta. It was as if he was being projected from a higher realm onto the screen of ordinary perception.

None of his disciples thought of Srila Prabhupada as being even slightly similar to anyone else within his or her previous experience. We were convinced that he couldn't be working and thinking under the influences that governed the lives of everyone else we had seen. Srila Prabhupada gave himself to others in a way that we had never experienced in any other person. He had no selfish interests, and he equally accepted whoever took shelter of him, irrespective of their background.

He never even slightly favored a person of one race, religion, ethnic group or nationality over another. He always encouraged whoever he met to understand the goal of human life and practice the means to attain it, assuring them that this would solve all their problems and give them genuine satisfaction. He never tired of the disciples who continuously surrounded him, accepting them as one would his own children, tirelessly helping them to become spiritually mature.

Srila Prabhupada taught the simple truth that a person is not the body made of natural elements, but is an eternal soul—a fragmental part of God, eternally subordinate to Him. As such, Srila Prabhupada implored his disciples to serve Lord Krishna (God) and not the bodily senses, which always demand gratification and yet are never satisfied.

Srila Prabhupada perfectly practiced what he preached, or shall we say—he exhibited the truth of the philosophy he taught and the lifestyle he advocated. He was continuously surrounded by his disciples for twelve years, so that he had no private life. Astonishingly, he had no second interest besides serving Lord Krishna, and had absolutely no vice or mundane habit. He never deviated from his service to the Lord to watch a movie or TV, read a mundane magazine, or play a game. It was obvious that even as he talked to young and beautiful women, Srila Prabhupada never regarded them in any way other than as eternal souls needing guidance on the path that he described as leading back home, back to Godhead.

There are numerous photos of Srila Prabhupada that bear testimony to his sublime ecstasy. You can look at his smile and not even begin to understand what he experienced as the camera clicked. Disciples would describe Srila Prabhupada's smile as lighting up the room, and that was not an exaggeration. He was not a showman. No one ever suggested that Srila Prabhupada played his part in a masterly fashion, fooling people into believing that he was completely absorbed in Krishna consciousness, or thought of God. There was no doubt that he was simple and genuine—without a tinge of duplicity.

Srila Prabhupada was most appreciated because he very bluntly told us the truth. Life was very confusing for us. Why do people kill one another in terrible wars? Why do we callously exploit one another, and our precious earth? Why is there

such horrible suffering in the world? Does God really exist? If God exists, does He still look after this crazy world? What happens at death? Is there some elevated state of existence where we can be above all the torment, anxiety, fear, and loneliness that plague us? Srila Prabhupada was the only person who answered these questions—in a way that made perfect sense.

Srila Prabhupada did not pose as a great mystic whose realization of the truth was a breakthrough, and thus a great personal accomplishment. He explained to us that a guru is like a postman in that he simply carries and delivers the message of his predecessors, without adding or changing anything.

Although he started his society, ISKCON, at the age of 70, and continued to expand it until his passing away at the age of 82, Srila Prabhupada worked with an energy, both mental and physical, that was beyond the understanding of his disciples. He would sleep only a very few hours and write his books throughout the late night and early morning. He would travel from one ISKCON center to another, and go from one speaking engagement to another, with boundless enthusiasm and energy. While on his morning walks, his young disciples would find it hard to keep up with him.

Everyone who knew him well concluded that Srila Prabhupada was not an ordinary person. As he himself indicated, he was a representative of the Supreme Lord, and we were satisfied with this explanation of how he could exhibit such extraordinary qualities.

Let us begin at the beginning of our quest to understand our self and our purpose in life. In a lecture on the Bhagavad-gita given in Los Angeles in 1968, Srila Prabhupada said: The simple fact, as it is explained in the Bhagavad-gita, is that a change of body is taking place at every moment. Just like this child. If you could somehow measure this child today, tomorrow you would find that the child has grown, or changed his body. That is known by medical science also. The body is changing. I had my childhood body, and then boyhood body, and now I am in a different body, but I remember all the activities of my childhood. Therefore, I am permanent although the body is changing. This is simple truth.

What is the difficulty for people to understand this simple truth? The body is changing, but I am not changing. I am eternal. Therefore, I am not this body. This simple truth is the first instruction of the Bhagavad-gita, or spiritual instruction. Unless one understands this simple fact, that the soul is different from the body, that the soul is eternal and the body is temporary and always changing, there is no spiritual education. If one identifies with this body, there is no understanding of spiritual knowledge.

The Bhagavad-gita is the ABCD of spiritual instruction and it begins from this stage. Try to understand this simple truth. This is the basic principle for further progress. This is the ABCD; that “I am not this body.”

This is the verse of the Bhagavad-gita that Srila Prabhupada was discussing: As the embodied soul continuously passes, in this body, from boyhood to youth to old age, the soul similarly passes into another body at death. A sober person is not bewildered by such a change.

The Bhagavad-gita is an ancient Sanskrit text that is known by everyone in India and has been studied by scholars and laymen throughout the world since a very long time. It has been translated into many languages and in English countless editions have been published. Before I read Srila Prabhupada’s Bhagavad-gita, no one had informed me that I am different from my body and mind, even though I went to a prestigious university and read so many books of the “great thinkers.” This alone convinced me that the claim that the Bhagavad-gita was spoken by God Himself, as the name (“Song of God”) implies, might very well be true.

Let us pretend that we are sitting together. I often ride trains in India, so let’s imagine that we share the same compartment. After some small talk, I would like to inform you of this simple truth and so I say, “Where did you grow up? Can you remember something interesting from your childhood?”

Many people remember walking to school with their friends. Whatever you might remember, I would next say: “There definitely is a “you,” who I am now talking to, isn’t there? My question is: “Were you, the person sitting next to me right now, walking to school with your friends (or whatever else you might remember doing) at the place you grew up, many years ago? Please consider this very carefully, because your answer will bring us to this simple truth.”

Think about this calmly and carefully. There really is a “you,” isn’t there? Yes! Of course there is! There is someone you call “I” and I call “you,” and you are the same person as the “you” of yesterday, and the day before. You are the same person as the “you” of a year ago, and it was you that went to school as a child.

Although this may seem obvious, there are many prominent scientists and others who would have us believe that there is no continuous “I” and “you.”

In October 1973, Dr. Gregory Benford, an associate professor of physics at the University of California at Irvine, visited Srila Prabhupada in the garden of the Los Angeles Krishna center. Here is an excerpt from their conversation.

Srila Prabhupada: The existence of the eternal spirit soul can be verified logically.

Dr. Benford: How so?

Srila Prabhupada: Just consider your body. You once had the body of a child, but now you don't have that body anymore—you have a different body. Yet, anyone can understand that you once had the body of a child. This is a fact. So your body has changed, but you are still remaining.

Dr. Benford: I am not so sure it is the same “I.”

Srila Prabhupada: Yes, you are the same “I.” Just as the parents of a child will say, after he has grown up, "Oh, just see how our son has grown." He is the same person: his parents say so, his friends say so, his family says so—everyone says so. This is the evidence. You have to accept this point, because there is so much evidence. Even your mother will deny that you are a different person, even though you have a different body.

Dr. Benford: But I may not be the same being that I was.

Srila Prabhupada: “Not the same” means, for example, that a young child may talk nonsense now, but when he is grown up and gets an adult body he will not speak foolishly. Although he is the same person, along with his change in body he will have developed different consciousness. But the spirit soul, the person, is the same. He acts according to his body, that's all—according to his circumstances. A dog, for example, is also a spirit soul, but because he has a dog's body he lives and acts like a dog. Similarly, the spirit soul, when he has a child's body, acts like a child. When he has a different body, the same soul acts like a man. According to circumstances, his activities are changing, but the person is the same. For example, you are a scientist. In your childhood you were not a scientist, so your dealings at that time were not those of a scientist. One's dealings may change according to circumstances, but the person is the same.

Our bodies are made of the same elements found in the inert objects around us. Our bodies were assembled from these elements, and after death they will return to them. Only for some days do we call it a body, just as only for some days were the elements that formed the twin towers in Manhattan called buildings. Energy is conserved, but forms are always changing. It is said that long ago the earth did not exist as we know it, but was simply a cloud of gas. In the Bible it is written: “Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shall return.” However, the simple truth that Srila Prabhupada taught us was that within this body made of “dust” there is a conscious person, an “I,” that does not change. Even a child can understand this.

I was talking with my friend, Sridhar Swami, as we were sitting in Govinda's restaurant in Mumbai. I had asked him to remember his childhood and he had told me that he couldn't remember anything. Being undaunted, I said, “Still, you were once a child, weren't you?”

Shridhar Swami replied, “Yes, I guess so.”

I asked, “You, who are sitting here with me—were you present in your childhood body?”

He thought for a moment and said, "I am not sure. I have some vague memory, but I cannot say whether that was the same me or not."

I knew that my friend was playing the part of the devil's advocate, but I persisted. "Alright," I said "let me ask you this. You, who are sitting here now, will you have to experience the death of your body at some time in the future?"

Shridhar Swami smilingly replied, "Yes. You got me."

You may not experience death for many years, but still you definitely feel that you, the person who is now reading this small book, will have that experience and not someone or something else. No one wants to die. Even if you somehow doubt that you are the same person that your mother carefully raised as a child, can you honestly say that you will not experience death? I don't think so.

Srila Prabhupada points out that your mother, friends, and everyone else considers you to be the same person that they knew many, many years ago, in spite of the change of body. If you sign a contract, you must honor it even many years later, in spite of the changes of your body. You cannot violate your contract and then argue that you are now a different person from the one who signed it. Suppose you take a loan from the bank. After many years, can you argue that you are a different person and thus did not take the loan and so don't need to repay it? When a boy and girl are married, they are asked to make a vow that they will stay together "until death do you part." After many years, when the body has radically changed, can a person claim that it was someone else who got married? Suppose someone failed high school many years ago. Can he say, "I did not fail! It was someone else?"

Anyway, I think you get the point. There's so much evidence that we are the same persons throughout all the changes of our bodies, and this is also our intuitive understanding. To think otherwise would be most illogical and unscientific.

Generally, people affirm that they were indeed present in a child's body many years before. As we continue our hypothetical conversation while sitting together on a train, I would say, "You seem to be quite educated and so you must be familiar with the scientific fact that all the cells in our bodies are continuously

changing, so that after about seven years, we have a different body in terms of chemical composition.”

If you concede the fact that our bodies are always changing, I would conclude by saying, “You are convinced that you went to school with your friends many years ago, and you know that you were not walking to school with this body, but a different one. The simple truth is that you are the same person, but you had a different body as a child. Therefore the only logical conclusion is that you are not the body.”

If you haven’t put aside this book and are still with me, you might be wondering, “If I am not the body that everyone thinks is me (including myself), then what am I?”

We are the subtle observers within our bodies. We are unchanging conscious living beings that some religions refer to as “souls.” When we wake up in the morning and look at our faces in the bathroom mirror, we think, “This is me,” but it isn’t. Don’t be upset! This is a very positive understanding. If you imagine your body being burned or buried after death, it would be comforting to understand: “That is not me.”

Are you dissatisfied with the world, or your life, or both? There have been revolutions in science, technology, communications, and entertainment, and there have been innumerable bloody political revolutions as well, but has the quality of life actually improved? Srila Prabhupada began what he called “a cultural presentation for re-spiritualization of the entire human society.”

We don’t really need an economic revolution. We don’t really need better technology. We need to produce a society of people that don’t hate, exploit, kill, mistrust, or stifle one another. This cannot be achieved by more money, better technology, or expanding the boundaries of entertainment.

Srila Prabhupada’s revolution was a revolution of consciousness. There have always been a few saints within all societies. It is not that Srila Prabhupada expected everyone to become a saint, but he wanted everyone to be guided in the right direction.

What are we doing wrong? What are we missing? It all has to do with the misunderstanding we have of ourselves, and the attitudes that sprout from this ignorance. A spiritual revolution will have begun when many people become convinced that life is not a product of matter. Srila Prabhupada discussed this with a scientist-disciple while walking in the early morning on Venice Beach in Los Angeles in 1973.

Svarupa Damodara: Life started from life. It cannot have begun from matter.

Srila Prabhupada: That's right. If you can establish this theory, you will get a Nobel Prize. Try for it. In this way, all these rascals will be defeated. The whole world is running on a false theory that life is born out of matter. But that is not a fact. How to defeat this theory? How it is possible?

Svarupa Damodara: By logic.

Shrila Prabhupada: Yes, by logic, by science. We have to make a program, because the entire human society is affected by this misleading theory. It is a fact that life comes from life. Of course, life does not come—it already exists. Matter is generated. Life exists eternally—it has no change. The change is in the outward, material body. In all respects we have to prove that life does not come from matter. Matter is generated from life, stays for some time, and then is finished.

How long can scientists cheat people? One hundred years, two hundred years? They cannot cheat them for all time.

Svarupa Damodara: Cheating has been going on since time immemorial, so perhaps they think they can continue forever.

Shrila Prabhupada: Not since time immemorial! Science has been cheating people for only the past two or three hundred years, not before that. For the last two hundred years they have been preaching that life comes from matter—not for thousands of years. And the cheating will be finished in another fifty years because people are becoming intelligent.

I have talked with many people about this simple truth—that our self is distinct from the body—and no one presented a plausible counter-argument. In my readings I have found only one type of objection to this simple logic. Sometimes, after hearing a description of how the body is changing while the self remains the same, someone points out that the genes passed on from parent to child do not change. To put this argument to rest, while on a morning walk in December of 1973 in Los Angeles, Srila Prabhupada spoke about this with his disciples.

Disciple: The scientists would say, “Because I have not experienced that I am eternal, how can I accept that I am eternal?”

Prabhupada: Yes, you are eternal. Because you were a child and now you are grown up. Therefore, you are eternal. You were a child, but you no longer have that child’s body. Now you have a different body. Although you have gotten different bodies, you can remember how you had the body of a child. Therefore, the conclusion is that the body has changed, although you have not changed. This is practical eternity. You have changed your body so many times, but you are the same person. Therefore, you are eternal, in spite of changing bodies. This is a simple argument.

Prajapati: I used that argument once, Srila Prabhupada, and some scientists said to me, “It is the tiny chromosomes (or genes) that do not change.” They say that the chromosomes are transferred from father to son . . .

Prabhupada: Still, the father’s body is not the son’s body. It is a different body.

Prajapati: It has come from the father’s body.

Prabhupada: That all right, but the father’s body is different. The father’s pains and pleasures and the son’s pains and pleasures are not the same. It may be that the father has given some ingredient of the body, but that does not mean the father’s body and the son’s body are the same. Nor is the mind the same, nor is the intelligence the same. Everything is different.

The Bhagavad-gita explains that just as I remain the same person as my body changes from childhood to youth and on to old age, I will remain the same person while leaving my body at the time of death and accepting a new body within the womb of my next mother. Lord Krishna begins the Bhagavad-gita by saying that all of us are eternal: Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings; nor in the future shall any of us cease to be.

The fact that I continue to exist in this lifetime as my body constantly changes points to my eternal nature. Therefore it is most reasonable for me to accept the statement of the Bhagavad-gita that I am eternal. In the Bhagavad-gita Lord Krishna says that the soul cannot be cut by any weapon, withered by the wind, or burnt by fire. The soul would remain unchanged even after a nuclear attack.

Anyone who spent much time with Srila Prabhupada became convinced that it is a very simple truth—that life and matter are two distinct entities, or energies. In the Bhagavad-gita, Lord Krishna says: “Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intelligence and false ego—all together these eight constitute My separated material energies. Besides these, O mighty-armed Arjuna, there is another, superior energy of Mine, which comprises the living entities who are exploiting the resources of this material, inferior nature.”

Still, we are accustomed to think of the body as the self, and because of this we may blindly assume that our existence will finish with the death of the body. “Seeing is believing” is one of our mottos. We cannot see the self, or soul, leaving the body at death. Still, with a little careful contemplation, we can understand that there is much more than that which meets the eye. Srila Prabhupada talked about this while conversing with his disciples in Pittsburgh in 1972 after a lecture on the Bhagavad-gita.

Srila Prabhupada: You are all young boys and girls present here. You had your past body as a child. Similarly, you will have your future body. I have got it, and you are awaiting it. Therefore the conclusion is that when this aged body as I have now, I am seventy-seven years old, when it is finished, I’ll get another body. As I have gotten consecutively from childhood to youth and then to old age, why not a next

body? This is the simple truth—that the living entity, or soul, is transmigrating from one body to another. This is the basic principle of spiritual understanding.

Devotee: People accept that our bodies are changing now, but they say they have no experience of the next life. They can see this body changing, but the next life they cannot see.

Srila Prabhupada: There are so many things that you cannot see. Does this mean that they do not exist? What is the value of your eyes? Now there is fog and so you cannot see anything. What you cannot see, you have to hear about. What you do not see, your next life, you have to hear about from authority. This is explained in the Bhagavad-gita, that just as your body has changed so many times in this life, after death, you will change to a new body. That is the statement of authority. Anything that you cannot perceive, you have to hear about from someone who knows.

You may not be willing to accept the Bhagavad-gita as an authority right now, but I believe that if you study it carefully your attitude will change. Generally, the people I talk to agree with everything I say regarding this simple truth, but I have also found that most people back away after being led to this conclusion, as if they find the thought of not being the physical body to be distasteful. Still, I believe that life (or at least human life) is meant for learning.

Looking back on my life, I feel that one of its highlights was when I became convinced that my self is distinct from my body. Another very important moment was when I was first handed a pamphlet of Srila Prabhupada's essays, entitled, "Krishna, the Reservoir of Pleasure." (In Srila Prabhupada's literature, diacritics are used in the roman transliteration of Sanskrit words because this makes pronunciation more accurate.)

I was confused, feeling that something was lacking. I had gotten my B. A. from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois and had married a fellow student, but I was desperately searching for an understanding of life that made sense.

Throughout my life, I never felt my existence to be trivial. I intuitively felt that there must be a great purpose of life, but I didn't know what that might be.

As a small child, I often wondered, "Why do I exist? Why was I born in this family? Why didn't I get a more handsome and more athletic body? Does God exist? What will happen to me when I die? If God exists, why did He make us so that we die? Why is there anything at all? Why isn't there nothing?"

I wondered and wondered about these things and my parents didn't have the answers. I didn't see the answers in the newspaper and I didn't see anyone on television answering these questions. My teachers in school didn't talk about these things and they obviously didn't have the answers either. Later on, I found out that even great philosophers and scientists couldn't answer these questions and when I was forced to attend Sunday school at my mother's church, I didn't hear anything that made much sense.

I was walking down Commonwealth Avenue in Boston one fine summer afternoon and a girl suddenly thrust a pamphlet into my hands. I understood that the girl was a Hare Krishna person (Jadurani-devi dasi) and I generally tried to avoid them. I didn't want to take the book but I think that someone wanted me to have it.

In a lecture in Los Angeles in 1968, Srila Prabhupada said: I was born in a different family, my Guru Maharaja (spiritual master) was born in a different family. 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 (God's) arrangements. We cannot understand how things are taking place.

I looked at the cover and it said, "50 cents." I only had a quarter (25 cents) in my pocket and so I thought that this would save me. I took the quarter out of my pocket and held it in the palm of my hand, saying, "See, this is all I have." She scooped it up and retorted, "That's alright. You can give me the rest next time."

After saying this, she vanished into thin air and I was left holding “Reservoir of Pleasure” in my hands.

This is practical proof that superficial attraction or repulsion is often misleading. I came to love that book! Later in the day, as I was standing in line, waiting to get a cheap ticket to hear the Boston Symphony Orchestra, just to pass the time I began reading the three essays. I looked at the back cover, where there was an amazing picture of the author, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. I looked and looked at that picture, and I couldn't figure it out: “What kind of ecstasy is this man experiencing?”

You can look at millions of faces but Srila Prabhupada's face appears absolutely distinct from all others, in an inconceivable way. And, when I read the essays, I was astonished. Here was a man who spoke about life and life's purpose without any doubts, haziness, bluffing, or personal pride. Reality was laid out before me in perfect detail and of course, I wondered, “Is this really true?”

It was as if the story of my life had suddenly begun a new chapter. My mind was filled with fresh thoughts and questions, and my former convictions were utterly challenged. I had intuitively felt that there had to be much more to life than what I had experienced, and now it was unfolding before me.

I already had a vague understanding that the self is beyond the body, and Srila Prabhupada presented a clear-cut means for attaining a factual realization of this. Then, one day, I asked a Hare Krishna devotee (Narayani-devi dasi), “How can I clearly understand that I am different from my body?”

She replied, “You have to see yourself as the knower of your body, and that your body, which is composed of dull matter, is distinct from you, the seer.”

This is the teaching of the Bhagavad-gita: The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: This body is called the field of activities, and one who knows this body is called the knower of this field.

She then said: “If you continue to chant Hare Krishna and sincerely pray to the Lord, He will certainly reveal this truth to you.”

I had been regularly chanting the Hare Krishna mantra while sitting quietly in my home or on the lawns of the Boston Common. I would repeat the mantra again and again, pronouncing each name distinctly while listening to my chanting with full concentration, as much as I was able. In this way I left behind my usual thoughts and filled my mind with these names of God and His energy for a half-an-hour or so.

What a relief to get away from my mind for a little while! I knew that I would have to calm my turbulent mind if I were to realize my self and I was told that the chanting of this mantra was the best and easiest way to do this.

Now I am convinced that one can easily understand the teachings of Srila Prabhupada if one regularly chants the Hare Krishna maha-mantra: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare / Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

Srila Prabhupada nicely explained the importance of chanting Hare Krishna: The transcendental vibration established by the chanting of Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare is the sublime method for reviving our transcendental consciousness. As living spiritual souls, we are all originally Krishna conscious entities, but due to our association with matter from time immemorial, our consciousness is now adulterated by the material atmosphere. The material atmosphere, in which we are now living, is called maya, or illusion. Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare is the transcendental process for reviving this original pure consciousness. These three words, namely Hara, Krishna and Rama, are the transcendental seeds of the maha-mantra. The chanting is a spiritual call for the Lord and His energy, to give protection to the conditioned soul. This chanting is exactly like the genuine cry of a child for its mother's presence. Mother Hara helps the devotee achieve the Lord Father's grace, and the Lord reveals Himself to the devotee who chants this mantra sincerely.

No other means of spiritual realization is as effective in this age of quarrel and hypocrisy as the maha-mantra: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

One day soon thereafter I went with some friends to Cape Cod, which is near Boston, and we stayed on the beach that night. It was a warm summer night and while everyone else slept on the sand, I stood facing the ocean, meditating on what I was hoping to understand: I am the conscious observer, and everything I observe is different from me. I am unchanging, whereas everything I see, including my body, is constantly changing.

For many hours I stood facing the ocean. The waves came in and out, the stars gradually moved across the sky, flashes of lightning were sometimes seen, and myriad thoughts entered my mind and left just as suddenly as they had come. Finally, as the first light of dawn appeared, the vision I had desperately sought became clear. I had stopped everything and stood motionless as the observer until I could finally see my conscious self as distinct from everything I observed, both internally with the mind and externally with the body's senses. I knew that if I could remain calm and observe things for years on end, I would see my body change, along with everything else, and yet I would remain exactly as I am. I saw myself as the knower, and not the whirling mind or the mechanism of the body, and I was ecstatic.

This event marked a turning point in my life. I became convinced that I should make it my prime priority to understand my eternal self. I would have to leave my body some day and so it behooved me to find out more about the real me. Of course, when my meditation was over and I was back in Boston, I continued doing the same old things. Still, the understanding that I was different from my body never left me, and I knew that I would have to accept a discipline that would enable me to strengthen my realization.

At heart, I had already accepted Srila Prabhupada as my spiritual master, believing that his words conveyed the truth about our existence. This is certainly faith, but

not blind faith. After all, I was well educated and had read many books, but no one had informed me of the simple truth regarding my self. It was Srila Prabhupada who woke me up to the fact that I am an eternal living being, distinct from my perishable material body.

Now, old age is approaching and I'm thankful that I don't consider the body that is destined to die to be me. A horrible future awaits the body, although today it may appear very beautiful. If we think that the body is our self, we don't have much to look forward to, even though now we may be famous, rich, or whatever.

Srila Prabhupada wrote about this: After death, the body may become worms, for if the body is disposed of without cremation, it may be eaten by worms; or else it may be eaten by animals like dogs and vultures and turned into stool. Those who are more civilized burn the dead body, and thus it becomes ashes. Yet although the body will be turned into worms, stool, or ashes, foolish persons, just to maintain it, commit many sinful activities. This is certainly regrettable. The human form of body is actually meant for enlightenment in knowledge of spiritual values. Therefore, one must seek the shelter of a bona fide spiritual master. One must approach a guru. Who is a guru? A guru is one who has full transcendental knowledge. Unless a person approaches a spiritual master, he remains in ignorance.

The Bhagavad-gita recommends that if we want to understand the truth, then it is imperative that we approach a bona fide spiritual master: Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized souls can impart knowledge unto you because they have seen the truth.

It is a fact that there are many who pose themselves as spiritual masters, but are not the genuine article. They may falsely claim to be spiritual leaders out of illusion or ignorance, imagining that they have realized a higher truth, or else blindly accepting a set of beliefs that was handed down to them, but sometimes

they do so simply to dupe the innocent public and thus get easy, easy money and receive cheap adoration.

There are qualifications for every position within society and there are qualifications for being accepted as a bona fide spiritual master. Srila Prabhupada often explained how Krishna, being God and the speaker of the Bhagavad-gita, is the original spiritual master. Those who simply pass on Krishna's message, without adding anything, distorting anything, or omitting anything, having heard it from a spiritual master in what is called the chain of disciplic succession of spiritual masters going all the way back to when Krishna spoke the Bhagavad-gita to Arjuna, are considered to be genuine spiritual masters.

Srila Prabhupada spoke about this while conversing with guests in New York in 1976.

Indian man: Srila Prabhupada, there are so many gurus . . .

Prabhupada: We are not talking of so many gurus, we are talking of the real guru, that's all. A real guru is one who is in the disciplic succession from Krishna. That is explained in the Bhagavad-gita. One who is preaching what Krishna taught; he's a guru. It is not that anyone and everyone can become a guru. If you want to be cheated by a rascal guru, that is your business. It is stated in the Bhagavad-gita that anyone who preaches the teachings of Krishna is a guru. You don't need to manufacture anything. Simply repeat the instructions of Krishna. In the Bhagavad-gita Krishna says to surrender unto Him. We say the same thing.

Srila Prabhupada pointed out that many so-called gurus teach something different from what is found in the Bhagavad-gita, or else quote Bhagavad-gita while misinterpreting the meaning to serve their own purpose. Although many supposed spiritual authorities may prove to be less than ideal, this should not make us cynical so that we reject a genuine spiritual master. It is my practical experience that a person can understand how life transcends the temporary physical body only by hearing from a bona fide spiritual master.

Truthfully, as soon as we understand our eternal self, a great burden of anxiety is lifted off our shoulders. I can remember thinking as a child, “The scientists say that life is a freak quirk of nature. After some billions of years, the sun will burn out so that life on earth will cease to exist. If this is the only life in the universe, then the phenomena of life will entirely vanish.” This made me somewhat depressed because it appeared that life was ultimately pointless. I was also unhappy to think that I would cease to exist after a lifetime spent searching for fulfillment.

Many times I hear people complain that religion does nothing to make the world a better place to live in. I was standing in line at the Indian Consulate in Kathmandu, waiting for my turn to apply for a visa. I heard the man behind me asking someone for assistance and I understood that he was an American. The form had to be filled out in black ink and he didn’t have a black pen. I had one and so I offered it to him and we got into a friendly conversation. It turned out that he had gone to a high school just a few miles from mine in Maryland. Then, in the course of our conversation, he made this comment: “I’m looking for a religion that doesn’t just talk about the past or the future in heaven. I want a religion that can make this world a better place for us to live.”

Of course, religion must primarily concern itself with our relationship with God. Still, it must also deal with our relationships with each other. For example, in a family, generally the parents’ first concern is that their children are trained to be obedient. But they must also be concerned about how their children treat other people. The simple truth is that when we talk about making the world a better place in which to live, we are really talking about teaching people how to treat one another better. What do you think?

Srila Prabhupada said that if we hope to live in peace, then the people of the world must be educated to understand the simple truth that we are not our bodies. Why? Because the bodily concept of life (the misconception that the external body is one’s self) is what divides us and makes us self-centered. In this excerpt from a conversation with Irish poet Desmond O’Grady that took place in Rome in 1974, Srila Prabhupada explains why this is so.

Prabhupada: You Irish people are never tired of fighting. (laughter)

O'Grady: No. We've been fighting for three thousand years.

Prabhupada: I think the fighting is still going on.

O'Grady: Very much so.

Prabhupada: So long as people remain in the bodily concept of life, that "I am this body," "I am Irish," "I am English," "I am American, or" "I am Italian," the fighting will continue. You cannot stop the fighting between dogs and cats. Why is there fighting? Because the dog is thinking, "I am a dog." The cat is thinking, "I am a cat." Similarly, if I think, "I am an Irishman," "I am an Englishman," it is the same thing. Just as we cannot stop the fighting between dogs, similarly, so long as people remain in the bodily concept of life, the fighting cannot be stopped. The bodily concept of life is animalism. When we think that "I am not this body; I am a spirit soul," then there can be peace.

You may object to Srila Prabhupada's statement that humans in the bodily concept of life are no better than dogs. You may be offended by this statement, but I ask you, "Why do we human beings spend more money on defense than on education?"

It is my impression that most people of every nationality consider their country and their culture to be the best. In India, where I have lived for a long time, there are many, many ethnic divisions and it is my personal experience that most people consider the members of their own ethnic group to be far superior to those belonging to others. In the bodily conception of life we make so many distinctions—black and white, Asian and Caucasian, this nationality and that nationality, male and female, ugly and beautiful, tall and short, and so on. The simple truth is that such conceptions of the self cause a great deal of anxiety, and often conflict.

There are many people who understand that these bodily differences are superficial and that all people should be treated fairly, without prejudice, and

with respect, although not many of them seem to occupy high political posts. Obviously, such people exhibit less hatred for those of other races and nations. This attitude can become firmly established when we understand the simple truth that each person is eternal, although temporarily embodied in various ways.

I would suppose that many of you reading this book have some faith in the existence of God. All religions teach that this world is not a fit place to live, and that we should therefore mold our lives in such a way that we can go to the kingdom of God after death. But, who understands this simple thing? When the dead body is burned or buried in the ground, what is it that might go to God, or somewhere else? It has been my practical experience that even those who profess to be very faithful to their religion have no practical understanding of the soul.

In the early 1980's I had written simple English versions of great religious epics widely read in India, including Ramayana and Mahabharata. I had no idea of publishing my manuscripts—studying these great classics was my hobby. I began by writing with a pen in notebooks and then graduated to using typewriters, first a small manual typewriter, then an electric typewriter and finally, a portable electronic typewriter.

Somehow, while living in Mumbai (formerly Bombay) in 1999 I decided to publish four manuscripts and this led me to buying my first computer. A friend of mine had a cyber cafe, and he sold me one of his old computers (a Pentium 1 desktop) for the price of a new one today. Then, he and I went to a shop to buy a mouse.

The shop owner, Michael, was a very friendly and polite young man. He asked me what kind of work I did. I told him that I am a writer and am working on a children's version of the Bhagavad-gita. He was surprised. Being a Christian, he assumed that, as an American, I would have more interest in the Bible than the Bhagavad-gita. Then, when he spoke of my work in a deprecating manner, I thought I should dismantle his pride.

I began: "In the Bible it is asked, 'What is the value of gaining the whole world if you lose your immortal soul?' Do you believe in the existence of the soul?"

“Yes”, Michael affirmed.

I continued, “You are an enlightened Christian. Kindly describe the soul to me, so that I can understand it.”

Michael remained silent, shaking his head in the negative.

I said, “I have read the Bible. There is mention of the soul, but I did not find any description that would help me understand it. Still, the soul is real, isn’t it?”

Michael nodded, “Yes”.

I explained, “If we have knowledge of something, we will be able to describe its characteristics. For example, your business is computers and so you can tell me the specifications and uses of whatever you sell.”

Michael again nodded, “Yes”.

I said, “It seems to me that, in spite of your being very proud of your religion, you are ignorant of the true nature of the soul. In the Bhagavad-gita it is explained that the soul is the conscious entity within the body, which is made of dull matter. The soul is described as the knower of the body and the body is called the field of activities for the soul.”

“In science, we learn that the body is composed of carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, and traces of other elements, such as iron. Are these conscious?”

“No”, Michael said.

I said, “Modern science, being largely atheistic, theorizes that even though these elements are not conscious, they somehow combine to form conscious living organisms. On the other hand, the Bhagavad-gita explains that consciousness is the symptom of the soul’s presence within the body. At the time of death, the soul leaves the body. Isn’t that what you believe?”

Michael said, “Yes.”

I said, “What is the real difference between a living body and a dead body? In chemistry, there are two divisions—inorganic chemistry and organic chemistry. Generally, it is mistakenly thought that organic chemistry studies living matter. The truth is, however, that the so-called living body is not actually alive. Of course, due to the presence of life, specific reactions take place that would not occur if life were absent. Cells divide, the heart beats, the brain functions, and so on, but these are not life—they indicate the presence of life within the body. The fundamental difference between what we call a living body and a dead body is the presence of consciousness. When a body has life, if I pinch it, someone will feel pain. But, a moment after death, even if I were to cut off an arm, no one would object. Why? Because the conscious living being is absent. This is explained in the Bhagavad-gita: As the sun alone illuminates this world, so does the living soul, within the body, illuminate the entire body with consciousness.”

“Michael, are my words reasonable?”

“Yes”, he admitted.

I said, “I think that many Christians believe that only human beings have souls, and not animals. Is that your feeling?”

Michael confirmed his belief that only humans have souls and so I said, “The Bhagavad-gita most reasonably explains that consciousness is the principal symptom of the soul’s presence within the body. You couldn’t refute this statement and so I ask you—don’t animals possess consciousness?”

Michael objected, saying that animals don’t possess consciousness like that of human beings. This is certainly true, but it is also a fact that many animals have more developed consciousness than a human baby. It is not the level of development of consciousness that indicates the presence of life—it is the presence of consciousness itself.

I said, “I have a dog named Scrab-do. He knows very well when I bring home something to eat. My dog is also my friend. He wags his tail and happily jumps on me when I come home. He understands something of my conversation and if I talk about giving him a bath, or sees that I am angry, he runs and hides under the

bed. Animals are certainly conscious and so the conclusion must be that they are also persons, or souls, embodied in matter.”

Michael seemed a little thoughtful and so I left it at that.

The Bhagavad-gita teaches that a soul, or self, is present within the bodies of all living beings: The humble sages, by virtue of true knowledge, see with equal vision a learned and gentle brahmana (the priest of India), a cow, an elephant, a dog and a dog-eater.

Let us admit our limitations. We certainly have learned much by studying whatever we can perceive with our senses, but the fact is that our senses are very limited. How can we understand that which is beyond our ability to perceive? The fact is that what we call science depends upon our powers of observation. And yet, everyone experiences that there are things too subtle to perceive with our gross senses.

In a lecture on the Bhagavad-gita given in London in 1973, Srila Prabhupada talked about this: Subtle means that we cannot see something directly, but still we may perceive it. Death means that when the gross body is lost, the soul remains in the subtle body—intelligence, mind and ego. The subtle body carries him to another body. But those who are not intelligent do not understand the subtle body, although it is clearly said (in the Bhagavad-gita) that the subtle body means the mind and intelligence. You have got a mind and intelligence—that everyone knows. But these rascals (atheistic scientists), because they cannot see the mind and intelligence, they think that at death life is finished. Everyone knows that he has got a mind and intelligence, but I do not see your intelligence—it is subtle. Just like the sky is in front of me but I do not see it. As things become more and more subtle, the gross senses cannot experience them. The soul is so subtle that it is not possible to perceive it with these material senses. . . It is so minute and so subtle that it cannot be seen by this gross eye.

Although subtle things cannot be directly seen, they can sometimes be perceived because of their influence upon that which we see. A simple example can be

given. Early in the morning, when there is the dawning of light, although the sun cannot yet be seen, it is positively understood that it will soon rise. Srila Prabhupada points out that although no one can see them, everyone knows that we have our mind and intelligence. Of course, those who only accept what they can see sometimes theorize that there is no real mind, but in practical dealings we accept the existence of the mind at every moment.

If a stranger were to approach me in the street and say, "Come with me," I would wonder, "What's on his mind?"

Even the soul, or self, which is subtler than the mind or intelligence, can be perceived indirectly by the effect it has on the body. In 1972 a distinguished panel met in Windsor, Ontario and discussed "problems associated with attempts to define the exact moment of death." Some comments of world-famous heart surgeon Dr. Wilfred G. Bigelow were included in an article that appeared in the Montreal Gazette.

Dr. Bigelow said, "As a person who believes there is a soul, the time has come to take the mystery out of this and find out what it is." Bigelow, elaborating on points he had raised during the discussion, said in an interview later that his thirty-two years as a surgeon had left him no doubts that there is a soul. He said "There are certain cases where you happen to be present at the moment when people pass from a living state to death, and some mysterious changes take place. One of the most noticeable is the sudden lack of life or luster to the eyes. They become opaque and literally lifeless. It's difficult to document what you observe. In fact, I don't think it can be documented very well."

We should conclude that it is not possible to perceive the actual nature of life with our limited senses. Of course, scientists can very nicely study the organism of the body made of material elements, but they are at a loss to explain why this organism develops within the womb of a mother, and what is actually missing when the organism ceases working at death.

We are accustomed to think, “This is a living body and this is a dead body,” but it is our self that is alive, whereas the body is an organism or mechanism that is either in working condition or not.

In this regard, Srila Prabhupada said: We take this body to be dead always. For example, this microphone is made of iron. When it is working it is iron and when it is out of order it is also iron. Similarly, this body is working because of the living force within. When the living force is out, it is called dead, but actually it is always dead. The living force is the important thing because it makes the body move. Actually, alive or dead, the body is dead matter and the living force is the active principle. That is the beginning of instruction in the Bhagavad-gita. The simple truth is that without spiritual touch, nothing can move.

The body is made of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen and other elements, and so is a robot and everything else we see. You are a conscious person with thoughts, desires, and emotions. Are these properties of matter—of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, or nitrogen? Are the elements aware of their own existence? I don’t think so. How then, by a combination of non-conscious elements, could a conscious entity evolve? As a person, what do you want more than anything? Everyone wants to love and be loved. Does water want to be loved? Do veins, fat, muscle, and blood want to love and be loved?

The only reasonable conclusion I can come to is that life has nothing to do with matter. It is a distinct energy that Srila Prabhupada referred to as “spirit.” Thus, within our experience there are two things—matter and spirit—and this is confirmed by the statements of the Bhagavad-gita.

Put your hand out in front of you and look at it. Where are you? Don’t you experience that you, the observer, are looking at your hand, which is outside of you? The only sensible conclusion I can come to is that the conscious self, which cannot be perceived by the senses, is associated with the ever-changing body and yet distinct from it. My dear reader, what do you think?

Srila Prabhupada would take a walk early every morning, along with his disciples, and there would often be lively conversation. One morning, the following exchange took place between Srila Prabhupada and Dr. Singh, a chemist.

Dr. Singh: “Do life and matter exist simultaneously?”

Srila Prabhupada: “Yes, but spirit (life) is independent, and matter is dependent. For example, I can live without my hands or legs. If they were amputated, I could survive. Therefore I am not dependent upon my hands and legs—my hands and legs are dependent on me, the soul within my body.”

Dr. Singh: “So, matter is caused by life?”

Srila Prabhupada: “Yes, and matter grows upon life—my body grows upon me, the spirit soul.”

Once, when I was walking in downtown Mumbai, I came across a man on the sidewalk who had no legs or arms. All of his limbs had been amputated. And yet, he was happily engaged in a conversation with someone that was full of smiles and laughing. Although his body was far from complete, the person within the body was still a complete person. That was obvious.

Srila Prabhupada often spoke about a theory that is at present accepted by many educated people the world over—that life evolved from chemicals. In a continuation of the above conversation with Dr. Singh, Srila Prabhupada spoke on this subject:

Srila Prabhupada: “I say to the scientists, ‘If life originated from chemicals, and if your science is so advanced, why can’t you create life in your laboratories?’ When this crucial point is raised, they reply, ‘We shall do it in the future.’ The fact is that the scientists cannot produce even a blade of grass.”

“Scientists claim that in the future they will create life from chemicals. Of course, anyone can claim whatever he likes, but we can prove right now that life arises

from life. When a father begets a child—the father is living and the child is living. Where is the proof that a child can come from a pot of chemicals?”

“Almost everyone in the world is under the false impression that life is born from matter. We cannot allow this nonsensical theory to go unchallenged.”

Dr. Singh: “They say that in the ultimate analysis, living matter came from nonliving matter.”

Srila Prabhupada: “Then where is living matter coming from now? Do the scientists say that life came from matter in the past but does not at present? Where is an ant coming from now—the dirt? . . . Sometimes, in the villages of India, people see that a scorpion has come out from a big pile of rice. The ignorant villagers think that the rice is giving birth to scorpions. But, rice cannot produce scorpions. The fact is that a scorpion sometimes lays its eggs in the rice and after awhile, baby scorpions come out.”

Dr. Singh: “One of the questions that arises when we start studying biology is, ‘What is the difference between a living organism and that which is not living?’ The textbooks say that the chief difference is that a living being can move and reproduce whereas dead matter can do neither. But the books never talk about the nature of the soul or about the consciousness of the living entity.”

Srila Prabhupada: “Consciousness is the primary indication that life is present. Only because of consciousness can a living being move and reproduce. Because of consciousness, he thinks of marrying and begetting children.”

It is an absolutely undeniable fact that we are conscious beings. The simple truth is that although we can assemble the material elements in countless ways, we cannot produce consciousness by such an endeavor. To think that this can be done, like the complex computer that became a conscious entity in the movie “2001” that was showing when I was in college, is simply imagination. Then, why do so many people believe this? Because there are already so many living beings produced by nature and all of them are conscious. Superficially, it appears as if

the body made of material elements is conscious and I also thought this until the age of twenty-four. So do all the scientists that are trying to create life in their laboratories! This is our big mistake—that we blindly assume that we are our bodies. The next big stage in the evolution of consciousness will come when we understand that we are distinct from our bodies.

Suppose that technology became so advanced that robots were made to exactly resemble human beings. Even when you touched them, the skin would feel so real and warm. By artificial intelligence, the robot would sense the weather and say, “What a beautiful day!” with its computer-generated voice. It would sense that you are sleeping and say, “Get up! It’s late!” What would be the difference between this robot and a living human being? Would the robot be alive?

A robot might have a device to sense the nature of your conversation, and it might be programmed to give appropriate responses, but would it have a sense of identity, a sense of “I”? Could the robot wonder, “Why is that person talking to me like this?” or would it simply give programmed responses? Would the robot possess consciousness of its self and its environment, like us? If you gently stroked the robot, it might be programmed to make sounds like “Ooh” and “Ah,” but would it really feel pleasure? Truthfully, the answer is no.

One evening, as I was walking with my daughter, Vrinda, who was eight at the time, she said, “I cannot understand whether my body is me or not. It’s very hard for me to think about.”

I told her, “Your body was formed within your mother’s womb. At first, it was so small that no one could understand it was there. The body develops very gradually. How? The embryo assimilates part of what the mother eats. It is said, ‘You are what you eat.’ At birth, it could be said, ‘You are what your mother ate.’ There is an umbilical cord connecting the baby with the mother. What is the umbilical cord? It is the passage that allows the mother’s food to nourish the baby’s body within the womb.”

“Vrinda, you forget how you were a little baby but still, you were there. Your body was made from your mother’s food. She ate rice, vegetables, cheese and bread. Are these you?”

Vrinda said, “Of course not!”

I continued, “Even now, what you eat becomes your body—little by little. When you eat a pizza, do you think that it will become a part of you? When you sit down at the table and see your dinner before you, you can easily understand that you are one thing and your dinner is another. After it goes into your body, some of it will be assimilated to form new cells, but still, I don’t think that it will become you. What do you think?”

Vrinda said, “Now I can understand a little better how my body is not me.”

My friend, Dr. Shanbag, once told this little story. There was a woman whose husband had just died. The family members were gathered and preparations for the funeral were in progress. Someone requested the wife, “Stay here with your husband until it is time to take the body for cremation.” The wife adamantly refused, saying that she could not bear to stay with the dead body. At this time, someone remarked, “For so many years you slept next to this body. You held it, you kissed it, and you loved it with all your heart. How is it that you are now repulsed by the same body?”

I was watching Baywatch on TV. A man had been attacked by an electric eel, and was brought unconscious onto the beach and CPR was administered. The lifeguard passionately pleaded, “George, hang on! I know you’re still in there!”

The conclusion is that it is not actually the body we love—it is the person who resides within the body. The fact is that, in and of itself, the body is disgusting. Without the presence of the soul, we dispose of it as soon as possible.

The body certainly looks like a person, with a head, chest, arms and legs—all arranged so nicely. Is it a person, or is it a mechanism that resembles a person? In the Bhagavad-gita, Lord Krishna says: The Supreme Lord is situated in everyone's

heart, O Arjuna, and is directing the wanderings of all living entities, who are seated as on a machine made of the material energy.

It is a fact that the body works mechanically. Here is an example. Suppose I ask, “When you touch something hot, like a frying pan on the stove, why does your arm jerk automatically?”

Here is the answer, gleaned from a science textbook: A reflex action is an automatic response to a stimulus like heat or pain. Your body automatically pulls away from such dangers without you having to think about it. Suppose your hand accidentally touches a hot frying pan on the stove. This stimulates a pain receptor in the skin. Nerve impulses are sent along the sensory neuron to the spinal cord where they are processed and sent back along the motor neuron. These nerve impulses enter the bicep in the arm, causing the muscle to contract and pull the hand away from the frying pan.

If I were to touch a hot frying pan on the stove, I would explain the experience like this: “I touched the frying pan and as soon as I felt that it was burning hot, I pulled back my arm as fast as possible.”

This would be my personal understanding. The description given above about nerve impulses is much different. In fact, it appears more like a mechanical explanation, rather than a personal experience. And, it is a fact that while touching a hot frying pan and withdrawing my arm, I have no understanding of what is really going on within my body.

After careful consideration, it becomes clear that there are two separate entities—the mechanism of the body made of physical elements and the non-material person who is embodied. Our confusion begins when we lump them together as one.

If we wait for the chemists and physicists of the world to unanimously proclaim that the self is eternal, we will miss our chance for further progress in understanding the nature and purpose of life. As Srila Prabhupada said, “Why not accept that life begins from life? What is the objection? That life somehow evolves from matter is a theory, not a fact. Why not also accept the theory that

life comes from life? This is also a theory. Then, let us compare—which is more reasonable? That life comes from life or that life comes from matter.”

I am the same person throughout all the changes of my body and therefore I am not the body itself, but the self within the body. The statement of the Bhagavad-gita, that we are all eternal beings, is therefore supported by sound logic. I am a conscious being and so it is not rational to believe that I evolved from dull matter.

As living beings, we exert a tiny control over nature. At the same time, we see that nature controls us in innumerable ways that we cannot overcome. Through science we attempt to understand how nature works and then use that knowledge to our best advantage. Within our tiny sphere of influence we may accomplish some small wonders but truthfully, nature is working in its own way and we have no ability to alter that. For example, it becomes very hot during the summer in many places. We can air-condition our home or office, but we can't change the fact that it's very hot throughout the entire country.

Those with a childish mentality think they are in control of their lives. Let us imagine a child building a sand castle on the beach. The tide is coming in. The child began building the sand castle quite some distance from the water's edge and as it progressed, he took great pleasure in his work, thinking himself to be very clever. However, the child became so absorbed in his accomplishment that he failed to notice how the tide was coming in until suddenly, a big wave washed over his sand castle, leaving only a mound of sand. Within his limited sphere, the child thought he had things under control, but a rude awakening made him understand that he is controlled by nature.

We often say, “What bad luck!” as if something had happened by chance. What do we mean by chance? The actual meaning would be that something occurred without any cause or control—absolutely unpredictably. Suppose we flip a coin. We think that it will come up heads or tails by chance, but the fact is that all the while it moves strictly according to physical laws. The truth is that we are not so

expert that we can control what will happen as we flip a coin. There is no chance involved at all. The physical laws that control the motion of the coin during and after the flip never make a mistake or deviate from their mathematically precise nature.

Similarly, we talk about motor vehicle “accidents.” Truthfully, there are no accidents. As drivers, we don’t have perfect control over our vehicles, we become inattentive, or we cannot understand that a mechanical failure is developing in our vehicle. The simple truth is that there are no accidents, because every so-called accident has a cause relating to our imperfections.

On a morning walk in Honolulu, as Srila Prabhupada talked with some disciples, this exchange took place:

Bali-mardana: When the scientists say accident, or chance, it simply means that they do not know.

Prabhupada: Yes, that is the meaning. But they will never admit the truth. They will never say, “No, we cannot calculate. We do not know. It is beyond our capability to understand.” They say, “Oh, it was an accident. It happened by chance.” They are trying to educate the students that everything has happened by chance, but I say, “Why do you try to understand the accident, spending so much money?”

In other words, Srila Prabhupada said, “If the scientists think that the universe, or life, came about by chance, then why do they spend so much money on research to come up with some kind of explanation?”

One day, in 1977, in Bhuvaneshvara, India, while Srila Prabhupada was walking with some disciples, he pointed to some flowers and explained that a rose bush will always produce roses and a gardenia plant will always produce gardenias. There are never accidents. You could stand for hundreds of years but you would never see a rose bush produce a gardenia by accident. He concluded by saying that there is no such thing as an accident.

In another conversation with a disciple, Srila Prabhupada said: Yes. Because you are responsible, as soon as you act irresponsibly something happens which you take as accident. It is lack of control. It is not an accident. Just like I may be shaving with control, but as soon as I become inattentive, the razor may cut my cheek. It is not an accident. It is due to my inattention. Nothing happens accidentally.

Syamasundara: Even if I open the front door and something falls on my head?

Prabhupada: Yes. Inattention, or ignorance. We should always be very attentive. Therefore, in the military, first they say, "Attention!" As soon as there is inattention, you meet with so many so-called accidents.

In still another conversation Srila Prabhupada said: Nothing happens accidentally. That is nonsense. There must be some arrangement. What is happening accidentally? You do not see the cause. If accidentally one can become rich, why are you struggling so hard to become rich? Let accidentally money come, and sit down. Why do they go to college? Let me accidentally become M.A., Ph D. This is simply poor thought. If things happen accidentally, why are you trying? What is the answer?

Amogha: Well, we have to try, but we can't tell what's going to happen.

Prabhupada: No, if you believe in accident, then you should not endeavor for anything. Nothing happens accidentally.

Another time, Srila Prabhupada questioned, "If things happen by accident, then why doesn't a bald man accidentally grow hair?"

We work hard to master a skill, make a profit, become famous, and somehow distinguish ourselves from the masses—but all the while, the rising and setting of

the sun indicates that our duration of life is diminishing until one day, it becomes obvious that we will soon die and leave everything behind, against our will.

I think of a great river carrying us in a raft downstream. We are helpless as the current carries us on and on. On the raft, we can do as we please, but we cannot alter the fact that we are being carried down the river. From birth to death is a river of time and we are helplessly being taken through the various stages of the body, from birth to childhood, to youth, to maturity, on to old age, and finally death. While being carried down this river, we can work hard, enjoy as best as we can, and travel here and there, but all within a very limited sphere.

Like a child, we may forget about death, but death will not forget us. We may talk about conquering nature, but this is foolish talk because nature is unlimitedly more powerful than us. If there is no rain, we cannot manufacture enough water to grow our food. When there is a tsunami, hurricane, or earthquake, we cannot subdue it. If the sun were to burn out or flare up, what could we do? If the air vanished, could we supply enough from our laboratories? Without nature supplying the ingredients, what could we do in our laboratories anyway?

The simple truth is that we are not able to do anything independently. Srila Prabhupada nicely analyzed the true situation in one of his books: By using intelligence one can distinguish his self from the things that he sees. The natural conclusion is that the living being, either man or beast, is the seer, and he sees besides himself all other things.

Now, by a little use of intelligence we can also readily agree that the living being has no power to see or to move independently. All our ordinary actions and perceptions depend on various forms of energy supplied to us by nature. Our senses of perception (1) the ears for hearing, (2) the skin for touch, (3) the eyes for sight, (4) the tongue for taste and (5) and the nostrils for smell, as well as our five senses of action, (1) hands, (2) legs, (3) speech, (4) evacuation organs and (5) reproductive organs, and also our three subtle senses, (1) mind, (2) intelligence and (3) ego, are supplied to us by various arrangements of gross or subtle forms of natural energy.

This conclusively proves that the living being has no independent power of perception or of motion.

We are completely dependent upon nature and fortunately, nature is working very systematically. I was driving my motorbike a few days ago on the narrow roads of Goa (India). As many other motorbikes, cars, buses, and bicycles came in the opposite direction (as well as some cows, dogs, and goats in all directions), I thought, "Driving is dangerous! Still, people have pretty good control over their vehicles and so I rarely see an "accident." What if all these vehicles were moving randomly, and not under the direction of their drivers? Then, driving would be a nightmare! I would be lucky to remain alive for even a few moments!"

Nature is also working very precisely, and not randomly. We depend upon spring following winter and summer following spring. We know that the sun will rise at a precise time, day after day. We have confidence that the temperature will stay within the narrow range that allows us to survive. The ocean, which is so vast, allows us to calmly walk along the beach, without fear of drowning. If nature were not working precisely, we could not live.

In Bombay, while giving a lecture in 1975, Srila Prabhupada said: The sun is rising exactly on time, and it is setting exactly on time. And the temperature varies precisely, according to the different seasons. Everything is managed so expertly under the order of the Supreme Lord. This is stated in the Bhagavad-gita, where the Lord says: This material nature, which is one of My energies, is working under My direction, producing all moving and nonmoving beings. Under its rule this manifestation is created and annihilated again and again.

Don't think that the sun is working so nicely automatically. It is not working automatically. The master is there, Krishna (God).

We, eternal living beings, are being carried through ever-changing conditions of life under the control of nature's stringent laws, even against our will.

Does God exist? Even as a child, I was an agnostic—a person who doesn't see conclusive evidence of God's existence, even though I can now understand that the evidence is all around me. When I was in the eighth grade, I became very curious to find out if astronomers had found a clue as to how the universe was created. I figured that astronomers were the only ones who could understand this because they looked all over the universe with their huge telescopes. Religions claim that God created the universe, but I felt that this was only their belief, and so I looked to science for some kind of proof. I had become interested in astronomy when a neighbor gave me a small telescope. My father also took great interest in astronomy and telescope making, and it was fun to look at the moon.

Anyway, I went to the Silver Spring (Maryland) public library every day, took some books on astronomy off the shelf and sat down at a table. I read about how, by viewing galaxies many billions of light-years away, we can see into the past that many years. I read about theories of the expanding universe and how it must have begun from a big bang when all matter was concentrated at a single point. I read for a few hours and then took some books home so that I could read some more at night. After a few weeks, having gone through all the books in the library, I came to the firm conclusion that astronomers have no idea of how the universe began, and they will never understand this at any time in the future. I was convinced that to understand the origin of the universe was simply beyond the capacity of a little human being who was born on a tiny planet billions of years after its creation.

Six years later, in my freshman year at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, I decided to take the introductory course on astronomy because I really wasn't interested in anything else that they were teaching. During that course, we were asked to write a paper dealing with current research in astronomy, using only journals of the last two years. I decided to once again delve into the question of whether astronomers had any clue as to how the universe was created, or if not, whether there seemed to be any possibility of them finding such a clue in the

future. I read all of the articles relating to this question in the astronomical journals available.

Ever since the seventh grade, I had been a mediocre student, simply because the subjects taught were not interesting to me. I struggled just to graduate from high school with a C+ average, and college was an even greater torment. In the paper I wrote, I came to the same conclusion as before—that astronomers had not even the slightest clue as to how the universe began, and they would never be able to find a clue in the future. I had done this research whole-heartedly, and had written with great conviction. I got an A+.

In a conversation with Lord Brockway in London in 1973, Srila Prabhupada pointed out how God can be very easily understood as he handed him a flower.

Prabhupada: This was produced in our garden.

Lord Brockway: Yes. Very beautiful.

Prabhupada: Yes. Now we can simply study this beautiful flower and come to God consciousness. How was it made so beautifully unless there is a brain? And what is that brain? In this way, you come to God.

If someone had spoken to me like this when I was a child, or even when I was in college, I would not have accepted that the existence of a rose indicated the work of God. I had been brainwashed by teachers, parents, and scientists telling me that life had evolved from simple molecules, although it was never explained how this really happened. Now, being freed from such absurd theorizing, I am convinced that a flower conclusively points to the existence of God.

Suppose that once again we are sitting together on a train in India. After some polite conversation, I show you a beautiful rose and say, “Could any scientist make this from his stock of chemicals?”

You probably would say something like, “Impossible!”

I would say, “What a beautiful flower, so soft and having a delicate and pleasing aroma. A dog might urinate on a rosebush but a human being, if he takes a moment, can appreciate the great wonder that is a flower.

The simple truth is that because nature produces things far too intricate for us to duplicate, even with our advanced science and technology, it is commonsense to conclude that nature is being manipulated by someone with far superior intelligence and ability. As the conversation with Lord Brockway continued, Srila Prabhupada talked about this.

Srila Prabhupada: The Supreme has such a nice brain that things are happening as if automatically. He doesn't have to personally work. As soon as He desires, immediately His energy (nature) works. Just like nowadays, we have electronic instruments. So, simply by pushing a button, thousands of tasks can be immediately accomplished. Just like we see, a big man has secretaries, officers, and other employees. He simply directs, “Do this,” and everything is done. Similarly, the Supreme Lord, as soon as He desires something, immediately it is done by His energies.

It is not that everything has come from nothing. This flower was first a bud and then it grew, but this happens in a way that is so quick and subtle that we cannot see how it is working and so we say that it has grown naturally. No. There is a brain. How nicely it is done. Even if you paint a flower, you have to use so many colors and a brush, and you have to apply your brain. So, there is no brain behind the real flower? Why should we simply say “nature?” What is nature? Nature is working under the control of God, or Kriishhna. So, those who can nicely study this flower can understand the greatness of God. This is God consciousness, or Kriishhna consciousness. Everywhere, one can see the hand of God.

We have discussed how the body, although appearing like a person with hands, legs, eyes, ears, and so on, is actually something like a machine. It is not that the ears hear—they are instruments that allow us, the souls, to hear sounds within a certain range. The nervous system is a system, not part of a person. The heart

works as a pump and the brain works something like a computer. Similarly, the universe should be considered a great machine, working very precisely under the direction of its operator, God. In Atlanta, in 1975, Srila Prabhupada spoke about this with a Dr. Wolf.

Srila Prabhupada: Do you think this nice flower has come out without any brain? Such a nonsense philosophy! The so-called scientist will use some bombastic word, “this, that...” that nobody but themselves can understand, but in essence they say that it is automatically being done by nature. That’s not the fact. Nature is an instrument. Just like this wonderful machine, the computer. Still, there is an operator. But they have no common sense, that where is the machine that is working without an operator? How can they suggest that nature is working automatically? Nature is a wonderful machine and the operator is Krishna, or God. That is real knowledge. The machine is working wonderfully and there is no operator? Have you got any experience like that, Dr. Wolf?

Dr. Wolf: No, sir, I don’t.

Srila Prabhupada: You have no experience and you say something nonsense, ludicrous. What is nature? Nature is a machine, just like this harmonium. It is also a machine and if an expert operator is there, it makes very melodious music. Will the harmonium play automatically? They have no common sense and still they are considered scientists. That is our regret. They are less than common sense men. We are not scientists, but we speak from common sense.

You may be wondering, “How can Srila Prabhupada say that scientists are less than common sense men?” It’s not that Srila Prabhupada deprecated the wonderful achievements of scientists—rather he criticized their making philosophical proclamations, such as, “Life originated from the random interaction of molecules.” My father was an award-winning chemist and an atheist. He did brilliant work with spectrophotometers, but this in no way related to a proof or disproof of God’s existence.

While on a morning walk in Washington D. C. in 1976, Srila Prabhupada clarified this while talking to some of his disciples.

Srila Prabhupada: No, no. We don't condemn the scientists. We say, "Take credit as much as you can. But why do you defy the existence of God?" That is our protest.

Sadaputa: They want to be God.

Srila Prabhupada: That is their foolishness. You have created a Boeing 747. All right, take the credit. But you cannot make a mosquito with a pilot, can you? Why not give credit to the one who created the mosquito?

Svarupa Damodara: That basic point they find hard to understand.

Srila Prabhupada: It is common sense—that you have created the Boeing 747 and so somebody must have created the small insect. This is common sense. You cannot see Him—that is your bad fortune—but somebody has done it.

Svarupa Damodara: Yes, that is our logic.

Srila Prabhupada: That we are protesting, "You rascal, stop this nonsense talking (that life originated by chance interaction of molecules)." There is a son and there is a mother, and so there must be a father. This is the conclusion. We can say, "I do not see the father." Still, without a father, how can there be a son? This is intelligence.

Devotee: Prabhupada, on the one hand you say the scientists are rascals, and on the other you say not to condemn them.

Srila Prabhupada: Rascal means when they say there is no God. Then they are rascals. Anyone who says that there is no God, he's a rascal. He may be a scientist, philosopher, or anyone.

The universe is often referred to as Mother Nature. It is a fact that from the earth so many living beings have been born, just as children come out from the body of

the mother. Here in Goa, India, where I am now sitting, the government often refers to Goans as, “sons of the soil.”

If nature is the mother and we are the children, then who is the father? Srila Prabhupada often drove home the point that Mother Nature could not produce children without the help of a father, such as when he conversed with guests in his room in Detroit in 1976.

Srila Prabhupada: To understand God there is a simple method. The earth is there, everybody knows. And from the earth, different varieties of living entities are coming. The grass is coming, the plants are coming, insects are coming, flies are coming, and bigger animals are coming. So, ultimately, they are coming from the earth. Is this not so? Is there any difficulty?

Therefore, material nature is our mother. The mother means wherefrom one comes. He’s your child because his body has come from your body. Everyone knows this. So, every living being is coming out of this earth in different forms. Now, if it is established that the mother is the earth and everything coming out of the mother are children, then where is the father? Is it not the next inquiry? The mother is there, the children are there.

Suppose an unknown man comes to someone and says, “Where is your father?” In the Bhagavad-gita, the father says: “I am the seed-giving father.” The father is God. God has created this earth and He has impregnated the earth with the living entities, and they are coming out. Where is the difficulty in understanding this? But because they are in ignorance, it will take these rascals a long, long time to understand this simple truth. They are so dull-headed. The children are there and the mother is there—there should be no father? What is the answer?

Let us again suppose that our science and technology became so advanced that a humanlike robot could fool most people into thinking that it was alive. Still, the robot would need an external source of energy, such as a battery, whereas a human being puts food in his stomach. Even if the robot could put food in its mouth to somehow generate energy, and the waste would be disposed of

through the anus, still, the energy produced would power a static machine, whereas the food consumed by a human being is transformed to produce new cells in a continuously changing system. What if one of the robot's limbs broke? It might be programmed to repair it, but human bones mend by themselves after being set! Although robots might be programmed to produce more robots on an assembly line, a "male" and "female" robot could never produce more of their kind by sexual intercourse.

The simple truth is that the reproductive, digestive, and other systems within our bodies function inconceivably. They are truly amazing, and far beyond our capacity to duplicate. Who then would dare say that such systems evolved by chance? Only a fool or a rascal!

God is the supreme controller, and He is the father of all living entities. God, the father, plants seeds of countless souls (ourselves) within the womb of nature, who then supplies our bodies. This is described in the Bhagavad-gita, where Lord Krishna says: It should be understood that all species of life, O son of Kunti, are made possible by birth in this material nature, and that I am the seed-giving father. Just as the father injects the soul into the womb of the mother, at the time of creation the Lord glances over material nature and impregnates her with countless living entities. This is the explanation of the Vedic literature. If we are convinced that the soul is not a material product, this explanation will be considered to be very reasonable.

The computer I'm using is made of simple substances. There's some plastic, some steel, and whatever else I don't know. These things exist all around us, but they never by chance combine to become a computer. The concepts embodied in a computer don't exist in iron, plastic, or whatever. They exist in the minds of the people who take these substances and fashion them into a computer. Similarly, our bodies are made of water, carbon, nitrogen, and so on, but none of these elements embody the concepts of eyes, ears, arms, hearts, brains, and so on. These exist in the mind of the Supreme Person.

Generally, being ignorant of the eternal soul, or self, people think, “I was born on a particular day, produced from the body of a particular person I call ‘mother,’ at a particular place so that I belong to that nation. I will live for some years and then cease to exist.”

However, if we were somehow able to rise above our limited vision of this one life and look at the vast expanse of time before and after the present, we would see ourselves caught up in a cycle of repeated births and deaths. In the Bhagavad-gita it is said: One who has been born is sure to die, and after death one is sure to be born again.

Srila Prabhupada often spoke about this, as while speaking to some disciples at ISKCON's farm community known as New Vrindaban, in West Virginia, in 1976.

Srila Prabhupada: We understand from the Bhagavad-gita that when the body is finished, the soul goes on living. Unfortunately, people have become so dull-brained that they cannot understand this simple truth. Every day of their lives people see that a soul in an infant body is going to take on a childhood body, then a teenage body, next an adult body, and later on an aged body. You and I can remember that ‘I was a small boy. I was a child.’ I can remember when I was six months old, lying down on the lap of my eldest sister, and she was knitting. I still remember. But where is that body? That body’s gone. Sometimes I think, ‘Oh, I used to jump and play but now I cannot do so because my body has changed.’ I want to jump but I cannot. The jumping propensity is always there but because of my old body, I cannot do it. People see, with their own eyes, how the soul is transmigrating from one body to another body to still another body.

Nevertheless, they cannot understand that at death, when the aged body is finished, the soul goes to yet another body, material or spiritual. People cannot understand this because they cannot make the simple distinction between the

body and the soul. It will take five hundred years to teach them this simple truth—their education is so advanced.

It's amazing! There are so many prestigious universities around the world, teaching a mind-boggling array of specialized subjects, and yet even those who leave them with doctorate degrees were never once taught the simple truths that we are not the temporary physical body, that we are completely under the control of nature, and that nature is working under the direction of God. Instead, they teach that the body is the self, that we can conquer nature, and that ultimate reality is atomic particles. There is no wonder that psychiatrists, drug dealers, pornographers, liquor stores, and armament suppliers are doing very good business.

Let us ask the question, "Why is someone born in a wealthy family, while someone else is born in a family that is struggling just to survive? Why is someone born very beautiful, while someone else is born with a terrible deformity? Why is someone born very bright, while someone else is born somewhat dull?"

Atheists would simply say, "By chance," although it is everyone's personal experience that everything has a cause. When we don't know the cause of something we say that it happened by chance. Those who profess a belief in God but think that the present life is our only one have a very difficult time answering this question. God certainly doesn't favor one person over another, and this is confirmed by His statement in the Bhagavad-gita: I envy no one, nor am I partial to anyone. I am equal to all.

Because we are eternal, our present condition of life should be understood as part of a continuum. The astonishing varieties of living conditions that we see are the current chapters of everyone's individual history. In this life I have taken up where I left off at the end of my previous life. What other explanation is there that even comes close to explaining the varieties of conditions that we are born into?

There are many people who believe that they will go to God after the death of their present body, or at least they say this. Srila Prabhupada taught us that this is the mission of human life— to go back home, back to God. However, there is a lot more involved to this than mere wishful thinking.

I once saw a hearse near where I was living in Goa, India. On the back was a sign that read: “Lord, I’m coming home.” From what I now understand about the transmigration of the soul, I find this rather over-optimistic.

In the Bhagavad-gita, the body is compared to our clothes: As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones.

Another example Srila Prabhupada would often give is moving from one apartment to another. If, for some reason, someone is forced to vacate his apartment, then he will have to move, and his new apartment will depend upon his ability to pay. Similarly, we are transmigrating from one body to another, and the kind of body we receive next will depend upon our ability to “pay.” Many people assume that they will automatically go to some kind of heaven after death, but in a conversation with his disciples, Srila Prabhupada urged them to consider why there are so many species of life.

Srila Prabhupada: There are so many varieties, or species, of life. Why are there so many varieties? What is the explanation? It is just like there are so many varieties of apartments. Why? You move into an apartment according to the payment you can provide. Therefore there are so many varieties of apartments, not just one kind of apartment. This is a commonsense affair. There are different tenants, they pay differently—therefore there are different kinds of apartments. Similarly, this body is also an apartment. The spirit soul is within this apartment-body. So, according to the payment, one has an American body, African body, Indian body, dog's body, cat's body, tree's body, and so on.

While speaking with a guest, Srila Prabhupada indicated what kind of “payment” determines the kind of body we will receive in our next life:

Srila Prabhupada: Our first concern is to tell you that you are not this body, that the body is your covering (your shirt and coat) and that within the body you are living.

Mike Robinson: Yes, I think I've got that now. If we could go on from there—you said that how you lived made a difference in your life after death, that there are natural laws that determine your next life. How does the process of transmigration work?

Srila Prabhupada: The process is very subtle. The spirit soul is invisible to our material eyes. It is atomic in size. After the destruction of the gross body, which is made up of the senses, blood, bone, fat, and so forth, the subtle body of mind, intelligence, and ego goes on working. So at the time of death this subtle body carries the small spirit soul to another gross body. The process is just like air carrying a fragrance. Perhaps you cannot see from where a rose fragrance is coming, but you know that it is being carried by the air. Similarly, the process of transmigration of the soul is very subtle. According to the condition of the mind at the time of death, the minute spirit soul enters the womb of a particular mother through the semen of a father, and then the soul develops a particular type of body given by the mother. It may be a human being, a cat, a dog, or any other body.

Mike Robinson: Are you saying that we were something else before this life?

Srila Prabhupada: Yes.

Mike Robinson: And we keep coming back as something else the next time?

Srila Prabhupada: Yes, because you are eternal. According to your work, you are simply changing bodies.

This is our practical experience. Just as our past activities have brought us to our present condition of life, so our present activities will determine our future. This is known as the law of karma, or action and reaction. Just as in physics it is known that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, the subtle laws of God dictate that we will similarly have to suffer or enjoy the results of all our activities in the future.

Some things are too subtle for us to perceive directly. We cannot photograph them, measure them, or cut them out and paste them in a scrapbook. Still, we can sometimes perceive subtle things when they influence what we can see. For example, I cannot see someone's anger but still, I sometimes know very well that a man is angry by the way his face is contorted and his fists are clenched. Srila Prabhupada would often say, "The face is the index of the mind."

When the soul, or self, leaves the body at death, it does not go alone. It is carried by the mind, and it is the condition of the mind that determines the body that is obtained. The condition of the mind at the time of death is influenced by the quality of activities that we performed throughout our lives, as well as by our attitudes.

Although what happens at death will always be a great mystery for those who simply rely upon direct perception, every night each one of us has a similar experience. Srila Prabhupada talked about this while instructing his disciples.

Prabhupada: Transmigration of the soul is clearly understood or not? Explain how transmigration takes place.

Madhavananda: In the Bhagavad-gita it is explained that our body changes from boyhood to youth to old age.

Prabhupada: That is the statement of the Bhagavad-gita, but I want you to explain how it takes place.

Satsvarupa: We get a body according to our desires. At the time of death, we have to accept another body, and that is determined by our actions in this life.

Prabhupada: That's all right. But how do you transmigrate to a new body?

Hamsaduta: According to the mental condition at the time of leaving this body.

Prabhupada: But what is the process?

Satsvarupa: The subtle body carries the soul.

Prabhupada: Yes. That is the main point. The subtle body carries the soul. Just like in a dream, we are carried by the subtle body and placed in different conditions. Still, so long as the physical body is capable of working, we come back to it when the dream is over. Death means that the body has become useless, and so instead of coming back to this body, we go to another body. This is transmigration.

It is a fact that while dreaming, although our bodies are practically inactive and we completely forget them, our minds carry us to a different environment where we act on a subtle platform. That the mind carries us to another body at the time of death is therefore not difficult to understand.

In a Sanskrit literature known as Srimad-Bhagavatam, which is considered the graduate study for those who have assimilated the teachings of Bhagavad-gita, transmigration of the soul is explained very clearly in this way: The Personality of Godhead said: Under the supervision of the Supreme Lord and according to the result of his work, the living entity, the soul, is made to enter into the womb of a woman through the particle of male semen to assume a particular type of body.

During a lecture on Srimad-Bhagavatam in Australia in 1975, Srila Prabhupada described in more detail the subtle body that carries us from one gross body to another: I do not die after the annihilation of this body, I accept another body. We have two bodies—this gross body and a subtle body. Just like you have your coat, and within the coat there is a shirt, similarly, within the gross body there is a subtle body. The gross body is made of the material elements. This is the outer covering, the coat, and within is another body of mind, intelligence, and ego. Everyone knows that you have got a mind and I have got a mind. Everyone knows that you have intelligence and I have intelligence. And everyone is proud of some

identification: “I am this, I am that.” These three are subtle. We simply see the gross body, but we do not see the subtle body. When death takes place, the subtle body carries the soul to another gross body. That we cannot see and so we do not understand how the spirit soul is transmigrating from one body to another.

Of course, those who are ignorant of their eternal nature will not prepare for their next life, but those who are in knowledge of the simple truth, if they are wise, will insure that their next life is as advantageous as possible. We should not be complacent; thinking that our present condition of life is alright, even though this is the prevailing attitude in present-day society. A child only wants to play, and never has a thought of the future. But the parents force the child to go to school, knowing very well the consequences of not preparing for the life of an adult. We should not childishly ignore the fact that our present activities are paving the way for our future existence.

Srila Prabhupada wrote: Today I may be a human being or a great personality, but with a little deviation from nature’s law, I shall have to accept a different type of body. Today I am a human being but tomorrow I may become a dog, so that whatever activities I have performed in this life will be a failure. This simple truth is now rarely understood.”

Srila Prabhupada was a very humorous person and he often joked, but only in a way that would illustrate a simple truth. In a humorous way, Srila Prabhupada pointed out the perils of not planning one’s next life in a conversation in Honolulu in May of 1976. This was especially humorous for the devotees because they had on innumerable occasions heard Srila Prabhupada advocate a lifestyle he termed Plain Living and High Thinking.

Prabhupada: Their policy is, “High living and poor thinking.” They live in a skyscraper but don’t care for where they are going to be in their next life—maybe as a cat or dog. Never mind. Now live in a skyscraper. High living, poor thinking (laughter). Nobody thinks, “Now I am living in this skyscraper building on the

twenty-fifth floor, and next life I'm going to be a cockroach here." (everyone laughs) They don't know that. He doesn't inquire, "Wherefrom the cockroaches are coming?" (everyone laughs) He has attachment for this twenty-fifth floor, but he's working so that he'll become a cockroach in his next life. So, Krishna (God) will give a chance, "All right. You live in the twenty-fifth story as a cockroach." And then you'll be killed by some . . . what is it called?

Devotee: Exterminator?

Prabhupada: Yes. That he does not know. Therefore, poor thinking. He's thinking that "I shall live here perpetually." And when death will come, "Get out! Become a cockroach!" (everyone laughs). What he'll do? What power does he have? How can the scientists stop this?

You might think that Srila Prabhupada unnecessarily painted a very bleak picture. However, the truth is that Srila Prabhupada very clearly understood how human life is the rare and valuable opportunity to escape the cycle of repeated birth and death by returning to the eternal association of the Supreme Lord. He also saw how, instead of aspiring to revive their dormant relationship with God, the people of modern society generally perform horrible acts that will force them to again descend into the lower species of life. It was out of compassion that Srila Prabhupada made such a great endeavor to warn people of the perils of violating the laws of God.

Death is a calamity, but losing the human form of life after death, being forced to accept a body from among the lower species, is the greatest calamity.

Some years ago, I saw a documentary about Etasha Pond in Africa. It is a lake where the animals in the surrounding area come to drink. During the dry season, the pond shrinks dramatically and water cannot be found elsewhere. Being forced to come to Etasha Pond, the animals become easy prey for predators.

The documentary very vividly portrays how animal life is filled with fear and danger. It was an intense experience for me to watch the unrelenting drama of

bare survival. Animals are continuously on the lookout for predators and when they are inattentive, they may be eaten alive. To find enough food and water and survive another day is the limit of an animal's concern. Danger lurks at every step! Suddenly, an attack by a stronger, fiercer creature! Torn to pieces and devoured! While taking a cautious drink, eyes dart in all directions and the heart pounds with fear. A mother may give birth and then watch her young devoured, one after another. Just to grow to maturity is a great accomplishment!

My gut feeling after watching this documentary was a loathing for life in the animal kingdom. And yet, it gave me a greater appreciation of the value of human life. I also considered how human life without developed consciousness resembles animal life and is similarly repugnant.

Srila Prabhupada had a very harsh view of contemporary society and its practices. He was especially appalled by scientists who do not recognize the existence of God and attempt to convince us that life evolved by chance interaction of molecules. Srila Prabhupada despised the way many people claim to be devout followers of Christ and yet blatantly disregard the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." He showed contempt for people who made protestations of humanitarianism while butchering millions of innocent animals. He was greatly dismayed by the countless mothers that kill their children within their womb, and he was disturbed to see how so many marriages end in divorce as people whimsically change partners. He felt pity to see poor people laboring in hellish factories, whereas formerly they had worked the land to produce food in a healthy environment.

Srila Prabhupada would often refer to modern society as a "polished animal civilization," because most people work very hard simply to eat better, sleep better, have better sex and defend themselves better. Srila Prabhupada wrote about the great danger of such a civilization: When one misuses the gift of the human form by unnecessarily indulging in the animal propensities of eating, sleeping, mating and defending and does not try to get out of the clutches of the material nature, which subjects one to repeated birth, death, old age and disease,

one is again punished by being forced to descend to the lower species and undergo evolution according to the laws of nature.

Although Darwin theorized that the bodies of the living beings evolved from simpler to more complex forms over a long period of time, the Vedic literature (the body of literature that includes the Bhagavad-gita) informs us that we, eternal souls, transmigrate through innumerable species until finally reaching the human form of life. It is not that the bodies of the living entities have evolved; we have evolved by transmigrating from lower forms to higher forms until we reached the human form of life.

Lower forms of life are not responsible for their actions because they do not have the developed consciousness to understand God and His laws (what should be done and what should not be done). A tiger will not suffer in the future for all the helpless animals it has killed. Lower forms of life simply act according to their acquired natures. Human life with its developed consciousness gives us great freedom, but if we misuse that freedom we become the architect of our future misfortune.

In a conversation with guests in Washington D. C. in July, 1976) Srila Prabhupada said: By the evolutionary process we have come to this human form of life. It is a chance to understand the value of life—to understand God and our relationship with God—and if we miss this opportunity, that is a great loss. Then, we will again have to accept another form of life. That is sure, as it is stated in the Bhagavad-gita. We have to change our bodies, and if we are not preparing what kind of body we are going to get in our next life, then we remain just like the animals. An animal does not know what his condition of life is. Human life, if we are missing this important point, that “I am going to change my body, what kind of body will I get next?” then what is the difference between us and the animals?

If we understand the law of karma and want to prepare for our next life then we should especially avoid those activities that produce very horrible suffering as a result.

While taking a morning walk in Los Angeles in 1972, Srila Prabhupada said: One who kills a baby within the womb by abortion will be put into the womb and somebody will kill him. In fact, as many babies he has killed within the womb, he'll have to be killed that many times in the same way, so that it may be impossible for him for hundreds of years to see the light of day. He'll remain within the womb and repeatedly be killed. One may not know nature's law, but still one cannot escape punishment. You can avoid being punished according to the state laws. Suppose you kill somebody, you can escape by some trick, but you cannot escape nature's laws. As many times as you have killed babies within the womb, that many times you will have to be killed within the womb. This is nature's law.

What about killing animals?

While conversing with Professor Durckheim in Germany in 1974, Srila Prabhupada said: They are so proud of their advanced civilization, but they do not even have human feelings. The poor cows, they give us milk, the most nutritious food, so that we can prepare so many varieties of nice nutritious food. So let them live. Why should we kill the cows? People have no common sense. They are leading a very sinful life and still, they are very proud of their civilization, even though they are suffering periodical wars. World war number one, world war number two, world war number three—this number will increase. And, without war, thousands of children are being killed within the womb. Even the father and mother do not want to see the child living: "Kill him." People are not afraid of any kind of sinful life. You see? But nature will not tolerate. Kriishhna will not tolerate. God will not tolerate, because He claims, "I am the father of everyone."

Look around you. There are so many species of living beings. How many plants and trees, how many insects, how many animals! What a great fortune it is that

we have attained the human form of life! After traversing the long road of evolution, perhaps we have some vestiges of primitive life that need to be shed. Srila Prabhupada pointed out one such example: “Milk, butter, cheese and similar products give animal fat in a form which rules out any need for the killing of innocent creatures. It is only through brute mentality that this killing goes on. The civilized method of obtaining needed fat is by milk. Slaughter is the way of sub-humans. For a human being—agricultural produce, fruit and milk are sufficient and compatible foods. Human society should give more attention to animal protection.”

Of course, there are many people who are capable of killing animals without remorse. But there are also many people who cannot bear even the thought of killing an animal. One evening, a few years ago, I was walking with my good friend Sushila to her music class. On the way, she met one of the other students, a girl named Devika. While talking, Sushila told Devika that she was going to cook dinner that evening.

Devika said, “I could give you some nice recipes.”

Sushila said, “We are vegetarian.”

Devika replied, “Uh, I could give you vegetarian recipes.”

From her tone of voice, I could understand that Devika was not a vegetarian. I said, “I think you eat meat. Do you?”

“Yes”, Devika said.

I asked, “Is it nice to kill animals?”

She replied, “If we didn’t kill them, animals would overrun the earth!”

I had heard that excuse many times and so I said, “No! If you go to the jungles, you will not find crowds of animals. There is a balance kept by nature. It is only when men raise animals for slaughter that you find a large number of animals packed in one place.”

Devika argued, “We kill animals. That is part of nature’s balance.”

I said, “It is the tiger’s nature to kill animals, but we are different. Because we have developed consciousness, we can understand that killing involves giving terrible pain to another living being. For this reason it is abominable.”

It was time to give the clinching argument: “Devika, what if I brought a goat here and handed you a knife. Could you cut its throat? You like to eat meat but could you kill the animals you eat?”

Devika became upset and backed away. She said, “No. I could never do that!” and ran into the music class.

I have spoken to many people who eat meat but are abhorred by the thought of personally killing an animal. The simple truth is that such people are hypocritical. Srila Prabhupada talked about this while conversing with a guest:

Guest: “If man wasn’t meant to eat meat, why in nature do the other animals kill to eat?”

Srila Prabhupada: “Are you an animal?”

Guest: “Well, we’re all animals. I don’t feel that I’m better than the animals.”

Srila Prabhupada: “Some animals, they eat meat because they follow nature’s law. A tiger eats meat, but it does not come to eat grains and fruit. ‘Oh, you have got so much grain. Give me.’ But, he’ll pounce upon a deer. That is his natural instinct. A tiger may eat meat, but I am not a tiger. I am a human being. If I have sufficient grains, fruit, vegetables, and other things that God has given, why should I kill a poor animal? This is humanity. What is the purpose of eating? To live. If you can live very peacefully, very nicely, with good health, by eating the innumerable varieties of food given by Krishna (God), why should you kill animals? This is humanity. If you have no discretion, no higher consciousness, then what is the difference between you and an animal?”

“Besides that, scientifically, your teeth are meant for eating vegetables. The tiger has teeth for eating meat. Nature has made it like that. The tiger has to kill another animal and so it has nails, sharp teeth, and great strength. But you do not have such strength. You cannot kill a cow by pouncing like a tiger. You make a slaughterhouse to kill cows while you sit at home. Somebody is paid to slaughter the animals so that you can eat very nicely. What is this? Do like the tiger. Pounce on a cow and eat. (laughter) But, you will not do that.”

Srila Prabhupada was not the only person who used strong words to condemn the eating of meat. Many great philosophers, scientists, artists, writers, and religious leaders of the past were vegetarian. There is no doubt in my mind that the abstention from eating meat helped to enlighten their minds with the noble qualities of tolerance, compassion, love, and non-violence. Buddha, Zoroaster, Pythagoras, Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Isaac Newton, Leonardo da Vinci, Wagner, Kellogg, Albert Einstein, George Bernard Shaw, Tolstoy, Milton, and Pope are just a few prominent personalities who were vegetarians. Listen to what they had to say.

Leonardo da Vinci used to buy caged birds and set them free. He said, “If man wants freedom, why should he keep birds and animals in cages? Truly, man is the king of beasts because his brutality exceeds all others. We live by the death of others. We are the burial places of countless animals! Since my early childhood, I have avoided eating meat.”

Pythagoras: “The earth affords a lavish supply of riches, and offers you banquets that involve no bloodshed or slaughter. Only beasts satisfy their hunger with flesh, and not even all of those, because horses, cattle, and sheep live on grass. As long as men massacre animals, they will also kill each other. Indeed, he who sows the seeds of murder and pain cannot reap joy and love.”

Benjamin Franklin: “Flesh eating is unprovoked murder.”

Henry David Thoreau: “I have no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off meat eating.”

George Bernard Shaw: “We pray on Sundays that we may have light/ To guide our footsteps on the path we tread/ We are sick of war, we don’t want to fight/ And yet we gorge ourselves upon the dead.”

Plutarch, in his essay, *On Eating Flesh*: “I wonder in what state of mind the first man touched his mouth to gore and brought his lips to the flesh of a dead creature—set forth tables of dead, stale bodies—and ventured to call food and nourishment the parts that had a little before bellowed and cried, moved and lived. How could his eyes endure the slaughter when throats were slit, hides were flayed, and limbs torn from limb? How could his nose endure the stench?”

Even as a child, I abhorred cruelty. There were some kids who took pleasure in torturing weaker kids, or even animals and insects—but for me, such behavior seemed perverse.

There was a walnut tree in the yard next to my house. One day, I saw a bird standing on the ground about forty feet away. I picked up a walnut and threw it. Really, I didn’t imagine that I would hit the bird. It was an impulsive act, performed in a sporting mood. But it so happened that the walnut found its mark.

As the bird lay flapping on the ground, I was horrified. I went close to get a good look and I could see that it was hurt badly and would surely die. I went home and all throughout the evening and night, the thought of the dying bird haunted me. I deeply felt that I had done a terrible thing.

The next morning, I hurriedly went to see if the bird had died or not. It was gone and so, at first, I felt relieved, thinking that it might have recovered and flown away. But then, I realized that much more likely, a cat had dragged it away.

For some days, I felt greatly pained at heart, thinking how I had done a terrible wrong by killing an innocent creature. At the same time, I went on eating meat three times a day—breakfast, lunch and dinner—never giving a thought to the suffering that had been inflicted upon the animals that went into my stomach.

When I was young, I was not given the freedom to choose whether to eat meat or not—not at home, nor at school. No one even suggested that it might be bad to kill animals. The summer after my junior year of college, I traveled alone to Europe. On the flight back to America, I sat next to a girl my own age. After being served dinner, she offered me her chicken.

I said, “What’s wrong, are you sick? Aren’t you hungry?”

The girl told me that she was a vegetarian and for some time, she explained to me why. I listened carefully and found that whatever she said was reasonable. Still, I happily accepted her chicken and ate it.

She said something like this: “Why should we eat animals? They are conscious living beings much like us. They have feelings and experience the same kind of pain and terror when they are killed. Is it nice to purposely give so much pain to others? If we can live a healthy life without meat, why needlessly kill millions of animals? Do you think that killing an animal is a nice thing to do?”

I didn’t argue because I felt that she was right. Still, eating meat was my life-long habit. For me, a meal without meat seemed hopelessly dull. At that time in America, the art of vegetarian cooking was in a primitive state. The wisdom of her talk certainly went to the core of my heart, but I continued eating meat for three more years. A seed had been planted, but it took time for it to sprout and mature.

I had a friend in college named John Swan. Once, I went with him to visit one of his friends. His was an evangelistic Christian family that tried very hard to convert anyone who came within reach. So, going to their house meant standing around the piano as they sang hymns. At this time, I was an atheist, and so I must have felt a bit intimidated.

In the course of the afternoon, John’s friend took out his air rifle and invited us to go to the woods in back of his house. He wanted to show us how he kills rabbits. I was horrified! I couldn’t stand the thought of him killing a poor rabbit, and I would not allow it to happen in my presence. So, when he spotted a rabbit and began to take aim—I ran ahead and chased it. I made a lot of noise to scare the rabbit, and I was relieved when it ran away.

I was bewildered to think about how a supposed man of God, who preaches love and kindness, was enjoying the hope of torturing and killing innocent creatures. In fact, I became convinced that this family was not genuinely religious, but were either fooling themselves or trying to fool others.

One day, as I was sitting quietly, I felt hungry. I asked my wife, Chris, "Could you heat up the left over meatballs in the fridge and bring them to me?"

After a few minutes, Chris brought me the plate of meatballs, swimming in tomato sauce. As I gazed at the plate on my lap, my vision suddenly altered. To me it looked like raw flesh in a pool of blood! It was as if, for the first time in my life, the truth of meat eating was fully revealed. But now, the sight of the cooked meat was not pleasing- it was disgusting! I was aghast to see the flesh mired in blood. I told Chris to take the meatballs away, and from that day onward, I stopped eating meat.

My mother certainly had compassion. I remember walking with her near our house. When she saw a squirrel that had been run over by a car, she said, "Poor squirrel!" Later on, while driving, when my mother saw a squirrel about to dart in front of the car, she exclaimed, "Watch out!"

But, the next moment, we pulled into a supermarket parking lot so that she could buy her steak, bacon, and chicken. Where was her compassion for the poor animals that had to suffer the pangs of death so that she could stuff their flesh into her stomach?

I'm not saying that my mother was a malicious person. I believe that she was good-hearted, but her sense of compassion had not been properly nurtured. She had been given meat to eat as a child and then had eaten it all her life.

The simple truth is that it is a horrible thing to kill an animal. Suppose a relative wanted to take your four-year-old child to see fruit being picked in an orchard, to see wheat or corn being harvested at a farm, or to see cows being milked at a dairy. Would you think that these experiences might disturb your child? But what if your relative wanted to take your child to a slaughterhouse to see how the animals are butchered? I think that you would say, "No way!" If there is nothing

wrong with eating meat, why is it so horrible to look at what it takes to put it on your table?

We are not living in a vacuum. While conversing with disciples in Paris in 1974 Srila Prabhupada described how our individual acts of violence create disastrous effects upon society.

Srila Prabhupada: We don't say that you should stop trade and producing food, but we want to stop these killing houses. It is very, very sinful. Therefore in Europe there are so many wars. Every ten years or fifteen years there is a big war with the wholesale slaughter of human beings. And these rascals, they do not see it. The reaction must be there. You are killing innocent cows and other animals, and so nature will take revenge. Wait for that. As soon as the time is ripe, nature will gather all these rascals together and slaughter them. They will fight amongst themselves. This is going on. Why? This is the nature's law. Tit for tat. You have killed and so now you must be killed. You don't require to be sent to the slaughterhouse. You'll make your slaughterhouse at home. You'll kill your own child by abortion. This is nature's law. Who are these children that are being killed in the womb? They are the meat eaters. Now they are being killed by their mother. They do not know how nature is working. If you kill, you must be killed.

In this small book we have given some examples of what is termed "bad karma," or activities that give pain to others and therefore cause one to suffer an equivalent amount of pain in the future. Of course, there is the other side of the coin; "good karma," or activities that benefit others and therefore cause one to enjoy in the future. Srila Prabhupada talked about this while lecturing on the Bhagavad-gita in New York in 1966.

Srila Prabhupada: Some people give charity and perform other pious acts so that in their next life they will receive good parentage, good education, and good wealth. There are others who perform more advanced karma to be promoted to heavenly planetary systems after death. There are many planets where the standard of living is far, far more comfortable than here.

How we leave the present body at the time of death and accept another one is a great science. We should not live like animals and thus risk falling back down from the valuable human form of life. We should not ignore the future and just leave it to “chance.” Although avoiding bad karma and engaging in good karma is certainly a great advancement over what is generally practiced today; that was not Srila Prabhupada’s objective. Like everything else in this world, the good results obtained by performing pious activities are temporary. Even if by leading a completely pious life one attains the upper (heavenly) planets within the universe, one remains within the cycle of repeated birth and death. In the Bhagavad-gita it is said: When they have thus enjoyed vast heavenly sense pleasure and the results of their pious activities are exhausted, they return to this mortal planet.

In his commentary on this verse, Srila Prabhupada wrote: One who is promoted to the higher planetary systems enjoys a longer duration of life and better facilities for sense enjoyment, yet one is not allowed to stay there forever. One is again sent back to this earth upon finishing the resultant fruits of pious activities.

Srila Prabhupada likened our transmigrating through various species of life to riding a giant Ferris wheel. As you ride a Ferris wheel, sometimes you are on top and sometimes you are at the bottom. No position within this world is permanent. Sometimes we find ourselves in an elevated position, but later on we will find ourselves at the bottom of the heap.

From this we should be able to understand that pride in the condition of our body is due to ignorance. It’s natural for a young girl to be proud of her beauty. It’s natural for a top athlete to be proud of his skill and strength. It’s natural for a politician to be proud of his or her ability to control others, and it’s natural for a rich man to be proud of his wealth. However, these are temporary conditions of life based upon the body that will not endure. When I was young the heavyweight boxing champion of the world was Cassius Clay. He would be seen before a match

on the television boasting, “I am the greatest!” Later in life, however, due to some debilitating disease, he could hardly walk, or talk clearly. It was pathetic to see him in this condition. One who is actually wise is not unnecessarily proud.

In the Bhagavad-gita Lord Krishna describes the qualities of a person who possesses genuine knowledge: Humility; pridelessness; nonviolence; tolerance; simplicity; approaching a bona fide spiritual master; cleanliness; steadiness; self-control; renunciation of the objects of sense gratification; absence of false ego; the perception of the evil of birth, death, old age and disease; detachment; freedom from entanglement with children, wife, home and the rest; even-mindedness amid pleasant and unpleasant events; constant and unalloyed devotion to Me; aspiring to live in a solitary place; detachment from the general mass of people; accepting the importance of self-realization; and philosophical search for the Absolute Truth—all these I declare to be knowledge, and besides this whatever there may be is ignorance.

In simple terms, real knowledge is the understanding that we, eternal living beings, are entrapped by matter and that the human form of life is the chance given to us to become free. It is not the study of history and the sciences that constitutes actual knowledge. In the Bhagavad-gita Krishna says: To understand this body and its knower is called knowledge. That is My opinion. Real knowledge is to understand the distinction between life and matter, whereas all kinds of knowledge based upon the misconception that the body is the self is ignorance.

Someone who is very proud of his body will not be inclined to understand this simple truth and for that reason humility and the absence of pride are pre-conditions for attaining actual wisdom.

We have understood something of how we change from one body to another in this world of dull matter. The question we will now ask is, “I am eternal by nature. Why has God placed me in a body that will die?”

One person is born in a very prestigious family as a result of previous good karma, and he may also be very intelligent and attractive, whereas another person is born in a very poor family as a result of previous bad karma, and he may be dull-

witted and ugly, but the fact is that both will attain the same miserable end. If you were to go to a crematorium and see the ashes of two bodies that were recently burnt, and if you were informed that one person had been a very wealthy man, whereas the other had been a beggar, you would not be able to discern which was which by inspecting the ashes. Or, if you dug up the bodies of two persons buried fifty years ago, you would not be able to say which had been more beautiful or handsome.

I asked my daughter Vrinda, who was eight years old at that time, “What is the worst thing about life?”

“Death,” she replied.

As a child, I thought much about life. To me, the worst thing was death. How terrible it seemed! After a lifetime of play, love, friendship and family, the accumulation of possessions, and the struggle to come to a mature understanding of life, as well as the life-long endeavor to position ourselves in society—everything abruptly ends! It didn’t seem right.

Isn’t it a fact that death spoils the whole thing? Isn’t it true—death is so repugnant that we push the thought of it out of our minds and pretend that we will live in this body forever?

In 1976, after arriving at Aligarh, India, Srila Prabhupada spoke about this while conversing with the people that came to greet him: The real problem is death, but they have taken it as ordinary. Still, nobody wants to die. The education we get from the Bhagavad-gita is that when the body stops working at the time of death, we, the souls, do not die. But who knows that he does not die after the destruction of the body? One who knows this should question, “Why was I am put into this position that I have to change my body, that I have to die?” This question does not arise. No one asks, “If I am eternal, why am I born in this temporary body?”

It's a fact that the biggest problem we face is that our bodies are constantly changing so that on the long road of life, we are being carried to the destination of old age and death. Generally, being ignorant of the fact that they are distinct from the body, people think that death is a part of life and so must be accepted, or tolerated. Naturally, someone who considers the body as the self would not be likely to think that the problem of death could be solved. But now, after understanding this much, we should try to find out why we are embodied in matter, and how we can become freed from material bondage. The simple truth is that we are not in a very congenial situation.

Although I was born in America and had been educated at good schools, I felt troubled and dissatisfied. Then I received a small pamphlet, "Krishna, the Reservoir of Pleasure" and when I read it, I was astonished by what the author had written: In our material conception of life, if we think, "I am happy," that is foolishness. There is no happiness in material life. It is impossible to have happiness here. In this condition, we do not know the actual meaning of happiness.

Are you really happy, or satisfied? Only you can say. When I heard Srila Prabhupada say that there is no happiness in this world I began to think about this very deeply. It is a fact that everyone wants to be happy, and it is my personal experience that almost everyone pretends to be happy. Whenever I meet someone and say, "How are you?" that person invariably says, "Fine." Truthfully, I don't think that many people are really in a "fine" condition of life. After much thought, I had to admit that I was never really happy or satisfied.

In "Krishna, the Reservoir of Pleasure," Srila Prabhupada wrote: Suppose someone is suffering from a disease. He is lying in bed, passing nature's call uncomfortably, and taking bitter medicine. He has to be kept clean by the nurses; otherwise there is an obnoxious smell. While he is lying down in this condition some friends come and ask him how he is feeling. "Yes, I am feeling well." What is this well? Lying in bed uncomfortably, taking bitter medicine and unable to move! Yet despite all these inconveniences he says, "I am fine."

As living beings, our desire is to always be happy and yet it is our practical experience that we are frustrated at almost every step. The advertising we see in the papers and on TV may fool us into believing that we just need a certain product, attitude, opportunity, or way of life to be happy, but the simple truth is that this world is a place of misery, as certified by the Creator Himself in the Bhagavad-gita: After attaining Me, the great souls never return to this temporary world, which is full of miseries, because they have attained the highest perfection.

The Bhagavad-gita was spoken and written down in Sanskrit. The actual words used here are *dukkhalayam asasvatam*. *Dukha* means “miseries,” *alayam* means “place,” and *asasvatam* means “temporary.” It may be argued that there is happiness in this world, and of course there is a kind of happiness, but it doesn’t last very long.

Because the very atmosphere of matter is uncongenial for living beings, Srila Prabhupada sometimes gave the example of a fish out of water, as when he was interviewed by a reporter in Melbourne in 1975.

Srila Prabhupada: We living entities are spiritual souls. We are not this material body. Unfortunately our system of education is so dull that the authorities do not know that we are not this body, that we are spirit soul. Still, they are considered big philosophers, politicians, and social authorities. But the real thing is that they are mistaken. They accept the body as the self and think, “Bodily comforts will make me happy.” But that is not a fact because the body is made of matter and we are spirit souls. There is a nice example: If you catch a fish and put it on the land, it will never be happy. You can provide it with every conceivable comfort, but it will never be happy on the land. As soon as you place it back in the water, though, it becomes happy.

We have used our advanced intelligence to invent cars and computers, airplanes and assault rifles, shopping malls and surround sound movies. We can live very comfortably, always keep ourselves entertained, and travel to any part of the world in just a day or two, but are we actually happy?

Srila Prabhupada here informs us that we are now out of our element. In the Bhagavad-gita, Lord Krishna informs us that there is another nature, which is eternal, like ourselves: Yet there is another nature, which is eternal and is transcendental to this manifested and unmanifested matter. It is supreme and is never annihilated. When all in this world is annihilated, that part remains as it is. It is known as the supreme destination—that place from which, having attained it, one never returns. That is My supreme abode.

There is a common saying, “Like father like son.” In the Bible it is said that we were made in the image of God. Srila Prabhupada explained that we are small samples of God and so by studying ourselves, we can understand God to some extent. In 1972, while lecturing on the Bhagavad-gita in Edinburgh, Srila Prabhupada said: If you deeply study God, you can understand Him, because you are a sample of God. You, the soul, are a minute particle. A drop of ocean water is salty, and the entire ocean is also salty. This you can understand. Similarly, by studying our individuality and propensities, we can understand God.

The quality of life, or spirit (both the Supreme Spirit, or God, and the minute individual living beings, or souls) is called in Sanskrit sat-cit-ananda. Sat means “eternal,” cit means “knowledge,” and ananda means “blissfulness.” When we accept the material body as the self, we think of ourselves as being just the opposite. The body is temporary, it covers our real knowledge, and it places us in a miserable condition. Now we are struggling to realize our original nature.

In a conversation with Kim Cornish in Perth in 1975, this original nature of the soul was very eloquently explained by Srila Prabhupada.

Kim: In the philosophy of the Bhagavad-gita, what is the nature of the soul?

Prabhupada: The nature of the soul is eternity, knowledge, and blissfulness. The soul is joyful, or blissful. Why have I placed this flower here? Why do I like this flower? What is the reason?

Kim: Because it's beautiful, perhaps?

Prabhupada: Yes, therefore you want to enjoy. This is the nature of the soul. I want to enjoy. This is blissfulness. Then, why are you trying to become a philosopher?

Kim: For understanding.

Prabhupada: Yes, therefore knowledge. Why do you not like to die? Because you are eternal. Therefore the soul's nature is eternal, full of knowledge, and full of bliss.

As I carefully examine my mind, I see that I am always anticipating the future, thinking that happiness will be just around the corner if I can be clever enough to capture it.

While giving a lecture, Srila Prabhupada once said: In the material world we are struggling for existence with the hope that someday in the future we will be happy. Still, we are bewildered. An animal in the desert sees a mirage of water and he runs after it further and further, so that in this way, as he crosses the hot sand he becomes more and more thirsty and finally dies. Our struggle for existence is like this. We are thinking, "Let me go a little further. There will be water eventually. There will eventually be happiness." Yet there is no water in the desert. Those who are unintelligent, who are like animals, seek happiness in the desert of the material world.

Of course, there are many people who will still say, "I am happy, and I am prepared to tolerate all of life's miseries." Srila Prabhupada's answer to such a statement was always something like this: "That's all right. Even if you say that you are satisfied to remain here, trying to become happy, the truth is that you will not be allowed to remain for long. One day death will come and kick you out of your so-called happy condition of life."

While conversing with a disciple in Mayapur (West Bengal, India) in February, 1977, Srila Prabhupada said: This is real suffering. Why should the eternal soul be subjected to birth, death, old age, and disease? We are seeing to this. You are thinking that if you can place yourself in a very nice building and have a fine car then you will be happy and your business is finished. We are not so foolish. We know that at any moment, we will be kicked out of the nice building or car by the laws of nature. That's a fact. But fools forget this. They imagine that their situation is permanent, but it is not. Our conception is that "I am permanent. Why should I be trapped in this non-permanent situation?"

If God exists, then why do we suffer? Why do we die? Why does he give us a body that can be torn to shreds, blasted to pieces, or smashed to pulp? To begin answering this question, we will pose a more fundamental one. Why do we exist? Srila Prabhupada answered this most fundamental of all questions while lecturing on the Bhagavad-gita in Los Angeles in 1972.

Srila Prabhupada: This material life is a concession to us given by God. Krishna does not want us to become entangled in this material world. You produce children. Why? To remain in family life—to enjoy in the company of your wife, children, and friends. Why do you take so much responsibility? You were alone. Why did you get married? Why did you beget children? Why do you make friends? Because you want to enjoy. So Krishna is also a person. He has produced so many children; all the living entities. Why? To enjoy along with them. Just try to understand the psychology.

Where did this idea come from, that "I shall be happy within society, along with my wife and children?" The origin is there in Krishna. Krishna is the origin of love. Anything that is within our experience is in Krishna. In the Bhagavad-gita Krishna says, "I am the origin of everything."

Krishna is a person, exactly like me and you, but the difference is that He's unlimitedly powerful, whereas we are limited. So Krishna also wants to live with His family. Our Krishna consciousness movement is to train ourselves to again

enter the family of Krishna. With our so-called families we are suffering, but the family idea is there. The family is perfect with Krishna.

Whatever we see in this material world has its origin in Krishna, but here it is reflected. Just like a tree by the side of a pond. When you see the reflection of a tree on the water, it appears upside-down. So this material world is a reflection of the spiritual world. It is false in the sense that it is reflection. Otherwise, exactly the same things that are seen here are there in the spiritual world. This example of the tree and its reflection is given in the Bhagavad-gita, fifteenth chapter. So here is the problem. We are attached to our family and friends, but this is a mere reflection of reality.

We belong to God's family, but now we are out of God's kingdom. The living entities we see in this world—all of them combined—are only a portion of God's children. The other children are living in the kingdom of God, and their number is far, far greater than us.

Here Srila Prabhupada says that we exist because God wanted to enjoy an unlimited number of loving relationships. Can you even begin to imagine another reasonable explanation for our existence? I cannot.

In the Preface to one of his books, Srila Prabhupada wrote: The basic principle of the living condition is that we have a propensity to love someone. No one can live without loving someone else. This propensity is present in every living being. At the present moment human society teaches one to love his country or family or his personal self, but there is no information where to repose the loving propensity so that everyone can become happy. That missing point is Krishna.

Previously, Srila Prabhupada likened our search for happiness to an animal chasing a mirage of water in the desert. Then, Srila Prabhupada referred to the Bhagavad-gita, where it is said that this world is a reflection of reality. The example is given of a tree growing on the shore of a pond. If you were to look

across a pond at an apple tree growing on the other side, the tree's reflection would appear upside-down on the water's surface. During the day, the reflection would be seen, but at night it would not. Although the reflection would look like a tree, it would have no real substance. The apples seen in the reflection could not be picked and eaten. Still, whatever was seen in the reflection could be confidently understood as existing in the tree.

In this world we experience temporary reflections of beauty, fame, wealth, and power. We appreciate the scenic beauty of mountains, lakes and forests. We are fascinated by the beauty of young men and women, but such beauty is seen for awhile and then vanishes. Even when someone becomes a president or prime minister, that affords no real satisfaction, because at any moment such a position can be lost. In Sanskrit literature, the cause of our frustration is described as *asat-grahat*. We are eternal (*sat*), or factually existing, whereas the things of this world are just the opposite—they are temporary (*asat*). When we, eternal living beings, grasp (*grahan*) something temporary, we are put into anxiety because we know that at any moment it may disappear.

While lecturing in Vrindavan, India, in 1972, Srila Prabhupada said: Here in this material world everyone is full of anxiety. This is the nature of material existence. Even a small bird—you give some grains to a small bird and he'll be full of anxiety. He'll look this way, he'll look that way, thinking, "Is somebody coming to kill me?" The living entities in this material world are full of anxieties. Why? *Asad-grahat*. Because they have accepted something that will not continue to exist.

Our body is temporary and this creates anxiety while flying, while driving, when diseased, while ageing, and especially during war and at the time of death. Once, when I asked someone, "What is the worst thing about life?" I was surprised when she answered, "The worst thing is when you love someone and that person leaves." I was surprised because I expected her to say that the worst thing about life is death. When I carefully contemplated her answer, though, I thought about how unfaithful "love" often leads to suicide, or at least thoughts of it. I wrote "love" because I am sure that real love cannot evaporate.

Because whatever we see in this world is a reflection of reality, and therefore temporary, the love that we experience is a reflection of real love. Srila Prabhupada taught us that our original and pure love is for God, but in this world we establish loving relationships with one another as a substitute. This no doubt provides us some satisfaction, but it also produces a great deal of anxiety.

Parents and their children have a natural loving relationship. We search for friends and lovers so that we can exchange love with them. It is very difficult to maintain these relationships, however, because everyone is filled with personal ambition. Srila Prabhupada spoke about this while answering questions after a lecture in Boston in 1968:

Srila Prabhupada: In the material world, lust is accepted as love. A boy loves a girl and a girl loves a boy, but it is lust. It is not actually love, because the boy wants to enjoy the girl and the girl wants to enjoy the boy. Love is not like that.

While lecturing on the Bhagavad-gita in London in 1973, Srila Prabhupada pointed out the nature of real love: The whole material world is like this. There are two living entities, male and female. The male is trying to satisfy his senses and the female is also trying to satisfy her senses. Here there is no love, because nobody is trying to satisfy the other person's senses. Everyone is trying to satisfy his or her own senses. A woman loves a man for satisfying her senses, and a man loves a woman for satisfying his senses. Therefore, as soon as there is some disturbance, there is divorce. We can make a show, "Oh, I love you so much. I love you so much," but the truth is, "I love you because you are beautiful. This satisfies my senses. I love you because you are young. This satisfies my senses."

Real love is based on service and not personal motives. Srila Prabhupada often gave the example of the love of a mother for her child as the best approximation of pure love that we can see in this world. While lecturing on the Bhagavad-gita in Los Angeles in 1969 he said: Service is love. Just like a mother renders service to

her child. There is no motive. It is simply love. Everyone can neglect the child, but the mother cannot, because there is love.

The psychology of parental affection involves the fact that the child is completely dependent upon the mother and father. A baby is especially dependent upon the mother. In this world, the simple truth is that although life is eternal, our bodies are constantly changing. Thus, when a child grows up, there are not only changes of body—there are changes in the conception of love.

While speaking to guests in the evening in his room in New York City in 1976, Srila Prabhupada said: Here in this material world, the so-called exchange of love is frustrating. So let us love Krishna and then we'll be successful. This is our mission. Everyone has a loving propensity. This child now has love for his mother, but when the child becomes a young man, his love will be transferred to somebody else. So here so-called love is not permanent, but when you love Krishna, it is a permanent exchange of love.

The same person, as a small child, will naturally love the parents more than anyone else, but as a young man, he will search for a girl to love. The person is eternal and the person's propensity to love is eternal, but in this changing world, love is variously directed according to circumstances.

We see an astonishing variety of life-forms around us. The human form is one of them and anyone would agree that human beings are endowed with unique capabilities that distinguish them from all other forms of life.

Human life is responsible life, unlike animal life. Srila Prabhupada pointed this out on numerous occasions, such as while lecturing in New York City in 1971:

Restriction is meant for human beings, not for animals. Just like when you drive your car, there are restrictions. You cannot drive your car on the left side. The law is, "Keep to the right." You cannot drive your car through a red light, but if a dog crosses the street when there is a red light, it is not punished because it is an

animal. If you violate the laws, you'll be punished. Why? Because you have advanced consciousness that enables you to understand what should be done and what should be avoided. If you want freedom from all restrictions, then you come to animal life.

The consciousness of animals is completely merged in the bodily concept of life. Having undeveloped consciousness, they simply act for the survival and welfare of their bodies, without considering the effect this has upon others. The body must have food and so animals will kill for food, or steal it. The body requires sex and so animals have sex without discrimination.

Animals are self-centered, thinking almost exclusively about themselves. Human beings are also generally self-centered and in the bodily concept of life. Like an animal, a human being has the propensity to do anything to fulfill his bodily necessities, but with developed consciousness, he can consider the effect that his actions have upon others. Animals interact with one another within a very limited sphere, but human beings now interact globally.

Animals are by nature exploitative, whereas compassion is a distinctly human quality that fosters cooperation. While in high school and college, I learned about many things I had not been aware of in my innocent childhood. I read books describing the great suffering that people inflicted upon one another throughout history. History seemed to be little more than a chronicle of wars, conquests, and revolutions. Political leaders fought one another for supremacy so that thousands or even millions of people died for nothing. Every race, every religion, every nation, and every ethnic group seemed to burn with hatred for others.

Even in times of peace, there is terrible exploitation of one class by another. I learned how, during the industrial revolution in America, immigrant factory workers were forced to live in subhuman conditions while toiling long hours. I read about how black people were captured in Africa, stuffed into the holds of ships, and later sold into slavery in America. History is littered with such tales—they are as numerous as the stars in the sky.

I was perplexed: “Why do people exploit and kill one another? Life is already difficult—why do people make it worse?”

All this began to create in me a terrible disgust. Of course, there were no doubt great men of exemplary character, but they were few and far between.

All good people yearn to live in a world where there is no fear of being exploited, harmed, or insulted by those who are physically, politically, or socially stronger. We don't like living in a world full of hatred, strife, violence, exploitation, and lies. We want people to treat us with kindness and respect, we want to be told the truth, and we want to be accepted as we are without having to play a role to gain approval. What this really amounts to is that we would like to live in a society of people who give respect to all others and do not want to flourish at others' expense.

There is such a place but it is not our earth. What can we do to make the world a better place to live? We can educate people, especially children, so that they can rise above the platform of animal existence, which is based on the ignorant bodily concept of life. In 1976, in Tehran, this conversation took place in Srila Prabhupada's room:

Srila Prabhupada: Do you think that in the United Nations they are united? They are all dogs barking, that's all. I said this in public. Some dogs are brought together and they are barking. That's all. Where is the unity? If you bring some dogs from the neighborhood and ask them, “Don't bark, live together peacefully,” will they be able to do that? What do you think?

Dayananda: No, it is their nature.

Srila Prabhupada: So if you keep people as dogs there cannot be any peace. You should make them actual human beings. Then there will be peace. All these members of the United Nations are thinking in the bodily concept (thinking that the body is the self), “I am American,” “I am Indian,” “I am Chinese.” So how will there be unity? There cannot be unity. We are proposing that you don't think in the bodily concept of life, but they have gone to the United Nations, keeping

themselves as dogs. There cannot be any peace. They must go on barking at one another, that's all.

Nava-yauvana: They think that they have to protect their so-called interests.

Srila Prabhupada: The dog is also thinking in this way. From three miles he begins to bark, "Why are you coming here? Don't come here. I am protecting my interest." That mentality is there in the dog, so how are you greater than the dog?

What about relations between males and females? How should human males and females relate to one another better than the animals? It is obvious that the attraction between male and female is a most prominent feature of life, if not the most prominent. While addressing students at Northeastern University in Boston in 1969 Srila Prabhupada said: The whole material world is hankering after sex. Whether you look at human society or animal society or bird society or insect society, everywhere you will find that sex is very prominent. That is the materialistic way of life. A boy is hankering after a girl, a girl is hankering after a boy; a man is hankering after a woman, a woman is hankering after a man.

More and more, the sexual attraction between boys and girls and men and women is pervading every aspect of society. While speaking with a guest at Mayapur, India, in 1972, Srila Prabhupada said: A woman is seeking the association of a man, and a man is seeking the association of a woman. All fiction novels, dramas, cinema, and even ordinary advertisements that you see simply depict the attachment between man and woman. Even in a tailor's shop you will find in the window a woman and a man.

Especially in advertisements and entertainment, people's fascination with sexual attraction is exploited to the max. Everywhere you turn—sex, sex, sex. At the same time, the divorce rate increases and the quality of marriage diminishes. This results in disturbed children, which means an increase of social problems and

crime. Where is truthfulness, where is honesty, where is integrity, where is faithfulness, where is dependability, and where is compassion? Going, going, gone!

Marriage is the traditional method of combining a man and a woman in all human societies. Male dogs go from one female dog to another, and when human beings act in this way, they act irresponsibly. What could be more irresponsible than making a woman pregnant and then not taking care of her and the child?

Srila Prabhupada once said: You have a tendency for sex—make it regulated by the marriage ceremony. This is human civilization, not that like cats and dogs you meet and have sex.

When the institution of marriage is strong, women and children are nicely taken care of. When the institution of marriage is weak, so that divorce and separation are the norm and not the exception, society becomes a kind of hell. When Srila Prabhupada began ISKCON in New York in 1966, many of his prospective students, boys and girls, were living together as friends, as was customary in America, but he would not allow this to continue and so he had them married.

While being interviewed by a reporter from the New York Times in 1972, Srila Prabhupada said: It is a man's duty to become a husband and a woman's duty to become a wife; these propensities are there and can be adjusted. I have many students and I get them married. A man wants a woman and a woman wants a man, so we say, "All right, live peacefully, but don't change partners." We don't allow divorce, nor do we allow boys and girls to live together as friends. If a man wants a woman and a woman wants a man, they should be united in marriage and live peacefully. Our program is to make people godly. Every sane man should take part in this movement for the good of society.

Srila Prabhupada said that if we want freedom from restrictions then we come to animal life. Human life is one of responsibility. Why then do we avoid the

responsibility of having strong families by doing everything possible to encourage extra-marital relationships? There's a kind of thrill driving recklessly like a madman without caring for the traffic rules, but is this responsible? There's a kind of thrill by skipping school and doing fun things instead, but is this responsible? There's a kind of thrill looking for newer and newer sexual partners, but is this responsible? The answers to these three questions are no, no, and no.

There's a kind of thrill going to a shopping malls, driving a great car, having cool electronic gadgets, winning a game or sport, and dressing in the best clothes money can buy, but did God give us developed consciousness simply for these, which will end with death? While being interviewed by a reporter in Los Angeles in 1976, Srila Prabhupada clearly indicated the reason why God has given us developed consciousness.

Prabhupada: Gradually, if we do not understand God factually, then the whole human civilization will become godless. To become godless means to again become animals. Human beings are meant to know God scientifically, for that is the actual aim of human life.

I may sleep in a very nice apartment, while a dog sleeps on the floor. Does this mean advancement of civilization? After all, sleeping is sleeping. Eating is eating. The male dog is enjoying with a female dog and we are enjoying with a beautiful lover, but the sex pleasure is the same. The animal defends with its claws and teeth and we have atomic bombs. So, eating, sleeping, mating and defending are the same for human beings as well as for the animals. What then is the difference between the animals and human beings? The animal cannot know God, but the human being can. That is the opportunity of human life, and if we miss it, we have nothing more than a polished animal civilization.

In this world we don't see Krishna and so it appears to us that we are living in a world without God. Why doesn't God appear in this world to convince all the atheists and agnostics of His existence? God is the supreme controller and so the

only conclusion is that we cannot see Him because He chooses not to be visible to us. Why? Why has God placed us in bodies that are destined to die?"

Srila Prabhupada's answer to this question is that this world is a kind of prison for those who do not accept God's authority. While lecturing in Los Angeles in 1973, Srila Prabhupada said: Everyone is thinking, "Why shall I become God's servant? I am my own master." Those who are envious are within this material world and those who are not jealous are in the spiritual world. You can test yourself whether you are becoming spiritually advanced or not. Just like eating—you can understand whether your hunger is satisfied or not. You don't have to take a certificate from others. If you are jealous of your associates, friends, and others—you are in material consciousness. If you are not envious—you are advanced in spiritual life. You can serve God very nicely if you are not jealous. Our enviousness has begun from our being jealous of God. This is the beginning of material life—enviousness of God: "Why shall God enjoy as the master? I want to enjoy for myself." When we want to become an imitation God, we are placed in the prison of the material world."

God is supremely independent. He is all-powerful and can act in any way He chooses, without impediment. We, being minute expansions of God, have minute independence. In essence this means that we can cooperate with God, or we can go our own way. God doesn't interfere with our free will. God doesn't want to make us slaves by forcing us to be good, or forcing us to obey Him. God wants us to love Him and love cannot be forced; it must be given freely.

Srila Prabhupada's message is that we are by nature eternal servants of God. The Sanskrit word dharma is generally translated as the English word "religion." However, there is a difference. The root of the word dharma means "that which sustains a thing's existence." In other words, dharma indicates the inseparable nature of something, and not merely a faith or belief. The dharma of sugar is sweetness and the dharma of fire is heat and light. Our dharma, or inseparable nature, is that we are eternal servants of God, but because we desired to act independently, we were placed in this world of ignorance so that we could have

the chance to imagine ourselves to be masters. Given the material body as a kind of second self, we think we are acting independently, but the simple truth is that we are serving the dictations of our mind and senses.

Regarding our minute independence, Srila Prabhupada wrote: The Supreme Lord owns and controls the entire creation. Not a blade of grass moves without His sanction. He is the complete whole. Then what is our position? Just as a king is no king without subjects, God is no God without His servants. He is the supreme enjoyer, and we are meant to take part in His enjoyment through service to Him. We are not meant to try and enjoy separately. He is omnipotent and thus completely independent. Our minute independence is a tiny reflection of His total independence. It is our misuse of that minute independence and our attempt to enjoy separately from Him that has resulted in our current predicament.

The simple truth is that we are subordinate to God and completely dependent upon Him for our very existence. In this world, when we establish relationships with one another, there is invariably a subordination of one person to another. As small babies, we are completely dependent upon our mothers. In school we are forced to accept subordination to our teachers, the administration, and those who wrote the curriculum. We are subordinate to our government and must pay taxes and obey other laws. While driving, we accept subordination to the police. Criminals accept subordination to their don, and in the military one must accept subordination to the commanding officers. In family life we must accept subordination to our wife and children, at least to some extent, and at work we must accept subordination to our boss.

And, even if we become a don, commanding officer, or boss, or even the president or prime minister of our country, we will still have to accept subordination to the laws of nature, which are subordinate to God. The don, the general, the CEO, and the president or prime minister will all be forced to grow old, become diseased, and die, and they will not be able to dictate their destinations after death.

Everyone thinks that they are some kind of master, but if we consider the matter carefully, we will realize that we are all servants. Someone is serving his wife, someone is serving his dog, someone is serving the need to acquire more and more money, and someone is serving the voters so that he can get elected. Even if we try to stand alone, giving up all service to others, we will still have to serve the senses of our body and our mind. When the stomach makes demands, we will have to eat. When thirst torments us, we will have to drink. When the genitals demand satisfaction, we will have to serve them in one way or another. When something captures our fancy, we will have to work hard to acquire it.

The simple truth is that we are by nature servants. Srila Prabhupada taught us that when our service and love are directed towards the root of all existence, God, we feel satisfaction, and when our service and love are directed away from the center, we experience conflict.

While lecturing in Boston in 1968, Srila Prabhupada gave a very illuminating example. If you throw a stone into a still pond, countless concentric circles will be generated. Having the same center, none of the circles will clash. But if you throw a handful of pebbles into that pond, each will generate its own circles and they will clash with one another.

It is a fact that one of the reasons life is such a struggle is that there are so many masters competing for supremacy.

In a letter to a disciple, Srila Prabhupada wrote: I try to enjoy as much as possible and others try to enjoy as much as they can. In the spiritual world the competition is how to satisfy Krishna. There the center is one. If you draw innumerable circles having the same center, these concentric circles will not overlap. But here, because everyone is his or her own center, the circles overlap. Even a small circle will overlap a large circle. This is because in the material world there are many centers, whereas in the spiritual world there is only one center. In the spiritual world, whether the circles are big or small, they never overlap.

Sometimes Iraq's circle overlaps Kuwait's, sometimes the Palestinians' circle overlaps the Israelis', and sometimes your circle overlaps mine. In this regard, at the time when there were large demonstrations in America protesting the war in Viet Nam, Srila Prabhupada wrote: Everyone wants peace in the world. The peace marchers do not know how to obtain peace, but they want peace. I read a speech of the Archbishop of Canterbury in which he said, "You want the kingdom of God without God." This is our defect. If you want peace at all, then you should know the real peace formula—that God is the proprietor of the universe, including the United States of America. He is the proprietor of Russia, He is the proprietor of China, He is the proprietor of India, He is the proprietor of everything. Because we claim that we are the proprietors, there is fighting, discord, and disagreement, and so how can there be peace?

First of all, one has to accept that God is the proprietor of everything. We are simply guests for fifty or a hundred years. We come and go, and while we are here, we are absorbed in such thought: "This is my land. This is my family. This is my body. This is my property." And when there is an order from the Supreme for one to leave his home, his property, his body, his family, and his money, one has to go to another place. We are in the grip of material nature, and she is offering different kinds of bodies: "Now, my dear sir, you accept this body." We accept an American body, an Indian body, a Chinese body, a cat's body or a dog's body. I am not even the proprietor of this body, yet I say that I am this body. This is ignorance. Peace can be had when one understands that God is the proprietor of everything.

Everyone is trying their best to exploit the resources of nature, individually and collectively. As the original father of all living beings, God has provided enough of everything for everyone in the world to live comfortably, but due to our exploitative mentality, some possess far more than necessary while others cannot even eat properly. There is enough air for everyone, there is enough water for everyone, and there is enough land for everyone to live and grow their food. There are enough of all the necessities of life for everyone, but due to ignorance,

we fight over what God has given us. Mahatma Gandhi once said, “There is enough for everyone’s need, but not enough for everyone’s greed.”

At present, the people of the world are struggling in the bodily concept of life. With their self, their family, their ethnic group, their company, or their nation as the center, they compete with others for supremacy. There are many people who are abhorred by war, exploitation, cruelty, hatred, violence, and greed, but the truth is—as long as we remain in the bodily concept of life, ignoring the fact that God is the proprietor of everything, these abominations will continue.

After understanding this much of Simple Truth, it is very apparent that human life is the chance given to us by God to get out of this miserable condition of repeated birth and death and return to Him, where life is eternal. Societies as we now see them were not built upon this understanding. What kind of society would be organized by persons who understood the simple truth?

When someone truly understands that human life is meant for self-realization that person’s life becomes a lot simpler and the tendency to flourish at others’ expense almost vanishes. One of Srila Prabhupada’s mottos was “Plain Living and High Thinking.” In one of his books, Srila Prabhupada wrote:

The wealth of the world actually belongs to Krishna, and every living entity, man and animal, has the birthright to use God's property for his maintenance. When one takes more than his maintenance requires, he is a thief, and as such he is liable to be punished by the laws of nature.

The wealth of the world should be used for the welfare of all living entities, for that is the plan of Mother Nature. Everyone has the right to live by utilizing the wealth of the Lord. When people learn the art of scientifically utilizing the Lord's property, they will no longer encroach upon one another's rights. Then an ideal society can be formed. The basic principle for such a spiritual society is stated in the first mantra of Sri Isopanishad: “Everything animate or inanimate that is within the universe is controlled and owned by the Lord. One should therefore accept only those things necessary for himself, which are set aside as his quota, and should not accept other things, knowing well to whom they belong.”

Krishna conscious devotees know very well that this material world is designed by the complete arrangement of the Lord to fulfill all the necessities of life for all living beings, without their having to encroach upon the life or rights of one another. This complete arrangement affords the proper quota of wealth for everyone according to his real needs, and thus everyone may live peacefully according to the principle of plain living and high thinking. Unfortunately, materialists who have neither faith in the plan of God nor any aspiration for higher spiritual development misuse their God-given intelligence only to augment their material possessions and advance their material positions. They are not interested in the laws of God or in a higher goal. Always anxious to fulfill their unlimited desires for sense gratification, they are conspicuous by their ability to exploit their fellow living beings.

One aspect of plain living and high thinking is that the children of God should look after one another and not fight over what their father has provided for their maintenance. Another aspect is that material necessities should be met with a minimal endeavor so that ample time remains for advancing toward the goal of human life—the revival of our eternal relationship with God.

Srila Prabhupada informed us that a simple agrarian lifestyle is most conducive for peaceful existence, which is a prerequisite for making advancement in spiritual life. While talking to a disciple in West Virginia in 1976 Srila Prabhupada said: Live in an open place, produce your food grains, produce your milk, save time, and chant Hare Krishna. Plain living, high thinking—this is ideal life. The artificial necessities of life increase your bodily comforts, but if you forget your real business, that is suicidal. We want to stop this suicidal policy.

Srila Prabhupada wanted to turn society away from growing tobacco and tea, producing unnecessary things in hellish factories, and cutting countless trees to produce heaps of useless newspapers, books, and magazines. The actual necessities of life are land to grow food and cows to produce milk. We need

adequate shelter, we required marriage to provide sex, and we must have adequate defense against those who attack us. Anything more than this Srila Prabhupada would call “artificial necessities.”

Srila Prabhupada wrote: Human civilizations should depend on the production of material nature without artificially attempting economic development to turn the world into a chaos of artificial greed and power only for the purpose of artificial luxuries and sense gratification.

At this point, someone might object by saying something like this: “Yeah, but there are so many religions that promise peace on earth and good will toward men, but all they do is fight among themselves. Look at history and see all the wars and persecution that happened in the name of religion.”

I have read that most people believe in the existence of God. But when I talk to people about God, I find that they invariably speak vaguely, without any clear conceptions. In this regard, Srila Prabhupada discussed the slogan printed on the back of United States dollars while lecturing in Los Angeles in 1973: The mission of human life is to understand God. God is there, this we cannot deny, but we do not know what is God, and what our relationship with Him is. Just like in your country, on the currency notes it is advertised, “In God We Trust.” But if we ask, “This is the slogan of your state. What do you know about God?” nobody can reply. They will say, “It is something like this, something like that.” Simply vague ideas. Nobody knows what is God, or how to trust in God. That is instructed in the Bhagavad-gita: What is God and how to trust in Him, but the people do not know this. They simply have the slogan, “In God We Trust.”

While lecturing in Los Angeles earlier in 1973 Srila Prabhupada talked about how so-called religionists fight among themselves because of not properly understanding God.

Srila Prabhupada: In the Bhagavad-gita the Lord Himself says: I envy no one, nor am I partial to anyone. I am equal to all. But whoever renders service unto Me in devotion is a friend, is in Me, and I am also a friend to him.

God cannot be partial. Everyone is God's son. How can God be partial to one son, favoring him over another? That is our mistake. We write: "In God We Trust," but we discriminate. If you trust in God, then you must be equally kind and merciful to all living entities. That is God consciousness.

If I can actually see all living beings in relationship to God, how could I think of harming anyone?

Srila Prabhupada elaborated on this point, using very blunt language, while lecturing in Vrindavan, India, in 1975: Religion means what is given by God. You cannot manufacture religion—this religion, that religion. No. Religion is only one. Otherwise it is cheating. The fight between the followers of different religions: "I am Hindu," "You are Muslim," "I am Christian," "I am Buddhist," "My religion is better," "Your religion is bad"—these are not religion. In the history of the world you will find many instances of violence between the followers of different so-called religions. In our country I have seen fighting between Hindus and Muslims. In Europe there is fighting between the Protestants and Roman Catholics, and there was the Crusades. So this kind of religion has no value. Religion means that when one understands Krishna, or God, he automatically understands that all living entities are Krishna's parts and parcels. Some way or other we have forgotten God. Therefore a devotee tries to bring everyone back to Krishna consciousness, back home, back to Godhead. This is our vision. We have no discrimination that "Here is a Hindu. Here is a Muslim. Here is a Christian. Here is an African. Here is a white person. Here is a black person." No. "Everyone is Krishna's part and parcel. Let them revive their Krishna consciousness and be happy." That is religion.

Another result of religious faith that is not grounded in a factual understanding of God is that it is not firm. The results of our activities are stored within our subtle body, or mind, and at the time of death, our desires will be taken into consideration when we are carried to our next body to suffer and enjoy the reactions to our karma.

God certainly helps us to fulfill our desires, but at the same time, He holds us accountable for our actions. We have a tendency to expect God to fulfill our desires while forgetting about our own responsibility. Srila Prabhupada sometimes spoke about people who pray to God and then lose faith when their desires are not fulfilled, as in this conversation that took place in Bombay.

Mr. Chugani: The ways of God in the world are difficult for us to understand. They do seem unjust.

Srila Prabhupada: Actually, you don't believe in God. Godlessness is the real problem. You only believe in God if God is your servant and order supplier. "God, if You don't help me, I won't serve You." People think of God as their servant and order supplier.

One of my Godbrothers from Germany told me that in the Second World War, when the men of Germany went to fight, all the women were left at home. So, they went to church and prayed to God that their husbands, fathers, and sons would return home. But none of them returned home, and the people became atheists. "Ah, it is useless to go to the church! I prayed so much for my husband, but he did not come. It is useless!"

So this is their understanding of God. When the war was declared, they didn't consult God. But when their husband is going to die, then they petition God. They order God to make their husbands return from the war unharmed. "God did not bring him back. He did not carry out my order. So God is unjust. We're not interested in God."

And this is the attitude here, also. When people act sinfully, God is never consulted. But when they suffer, then they cry to God. And if He doesn't supply

their order, they become atheists. "God is unjust!" they say. This is their rascaldom.

We see that in this world everything works in terms of cause and effect, and nothing happens by chance, or accident. It is natural for us to conclude that the original cause of the universe is God, the Supreme Person and Supreme Controller.

In the Bhagavad-gita Krishna says: I am the source of all spiritual and material worlds. Everything emanates from Me. The wise who perfectly know this engage in My devotional service and worship Me with all their hearts.

God is the Supreme Person and He is the origin of everything. No person of any religion would argue with that. As the origin of everything, whatever we experience in God's creation must exist in Him to perfection. While performing the marriage ceremony of two of his disciples in Montreal in 1968, Srila Prabhupada gave a hint of one of the ways that God is the supreme lover and beloved.

Srila Prabhupada: God is He from whom everything has emanated. This is a very simple definition of God. This means that He is the fountainhead of everything, the source of everything. In this world we see that a woman's attraction for a man and a man's attraction for woman are prominent. Not only in human society, but in animal society and bird society there is always attraction between male and female. Why? Because this attraction is present in God. Without being present in God, how could anything be manifested in His creation?

Once, while eating lunch in Tirupati, India, I glanced at the wall and there hung a picture that captivated me. Radha and Krishna were sitting on a swing decorated with flowers, absorbed in a mood of conjugal happiness. The name Radha is derived from the Sanskrit word, aradhana, which means worship. Thus, Radha is

understood to be the supreme worshiper of God. In the Vedic literature She is described as Krishna's most dearly beloved. I thought, "Yes, this is God! God is surely the Supreme Enjoyer and this is certainly the supreme enjoyment. Who else has such a conception of God?"

In the Preface of his book, KRiShNA, The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Srila Prabhupada wrote: In the Western countries, when someone sees the cover of a book like Krishna (having a picture of Radha and Krisihna on a swing), he immediately asks, "Who is Krishna? Who is the girl with Krishna?"

The immediate answer is that Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. How is that? Because He conforms in exact detail to descriptions of the Supreme Being.

Some people think that by advancing the cause of moral principles and religious rites they will be happy. Others may think that happiness can be achieved by economic development, and yet others think that simply by enjoying sensual pleasures they will be happy. But the real fact is that people can be happy only by loving Krishna.

Krishna can perfectly reciprocate one's loving propensities in different relationships. One can love Krishna as the supreme unknown, as the supreme master, the supreme friend, the supreme child, or as the supreme lover. These are the five basic loving relationships. If one simply reposes his dormant loving propensity in Krishna, then his life becomes successful. This is not a fiction but is a fact that can be realized by practical application.

As you have seen, Srila Prabhupada invariably referred to God as Krishna. Back in 1966, when Srila Prabhupada was forming his International Society for Krishna Consciousness, someone suggested that he be more accommodating and name his organization "International Society for God Consciousness." Srila Prabhupada didn't take this advice, as he explained while lecturing in Los Angeles in 1972: When this society was registered in 1966 in New York, some friend suggested that the society should be called "God consciousness." He thought the name Krishna

to be sectarian. In an English dictionary also, it is said, “Krishna is a Hindu god.” But actually, if there is any name that can be given to God, it is Krishna. The name Krishna means “all-attractive.”

In the West everyone knows how God is portrayed as an old man with a beard on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican in Rome. Someone once commented, “Adam looks healthier than God!” This could not be the fact if God is the fountainhead of everything. And, on the platform of eternity, how could someone look old?

If we want to advance from a vague, or materialistic, conception of God to an introduction to His personality, our only alternative is to accept the descriptions of Krishna given in the Vedic literature. Admittedly this requires faith, but why shouldn't we have faith in the literature that has already taught us so much?

Srila Prabhupada: “We are trying to give this contribution—the true understanding of God—His form, His name, His address, everything. Here is the form of God, Krishna. If you do not believe that He is God, then you must present your idea of God. If you have no idea of God then you should accept the description of God from me. How can you say that Krishna is not God?”

The simple truth is that if we are not willing to accept Krishna as God then we will have to remain without any clear conception of God's personality. Sometimes people would accuse Srila Prabhupada of being dogmatic. In the following exchange with Professor Thomas J. Hopkins, the Chairman of the Department of Religious Thought at Franklin and Marshall College, he counter-accused those who simply reject the assertion that Krishna is God without thorough study of the matter as themselves being dogmatic.

Prabhupada: You must accept that God is one. God cannot be many. If God has a competitor, then he is not God.

Prof. Hopkins: Okay.

Prabhupada: So if you don't accept Krishna as the only God, then you should present who is God. Either you should learn from me, or I should learn from you.

If you do not know who is God, you cannot say, "Krishna is not God." As soon as you say, "Krishna is not God," that means you must know who is God. But if you cannot tell me who is God then you cannot say, "Krishna is not God."

Prof. Hopkins: All right.

Prabhupada: So they are dogmatic. Dogmatically they are saying, "Krishna is not God." He does not know God and he says, "Krishna is not God." What is this nonsense? You do not know God. How you can say Krishna is not God?

Prof. Hopkins: I agree with you.

The assertion that Krishna is God does not contradict any particular religion; it simply informs us about that which the religions of the world have no information.

In this regard, while lecturing in Bombay in 1972, Srila Prabhupada said: We have got our pilgrimage, every religion has some pilgrimage. The Muslims have, the Christians have, the Hindus have. In the Koran there is God consciousness, in the Bible there is God consciousness, and in the Vedas there is God consciousness. The aim and objective is everywhere the same, but in the Vedic literature it is very explicitly presented. That is the difference. The Christians agree, "God is great." We also agree, "God is great." But how God is great is explained in the Vedic literature. There is no difference of opinion if one is actually religious. God created this world, God is the supreme father, God is great. This is accepted by everyone, whether Hindu, Muslim or Christian, but in the Vedic literature you'll understand how God is great. God's name is there, God's address is there. Any other scriptures will not inform you of what God is doing, but we can tell you. Actually, we do not tell you—God Himself says.

The best way to learn about Krishna is to read “KRISHNA, The Supreme Personality of Godhead,” written by Srila Prabhupada, which is available at any ISKCON temple. In this book Krishna is described as the all-attractive ever-youthful supreme male, captivating all who behold Him. Krishna is never alone, being always surrounded by His associates who love Him in five primary relationships called neutrality (the understanding that God is great), servitorship (the relationship of accepting the Lord as one’s master), friendship (treating the Lord as an equal), parental (treating the Lord as one’s son) and conjugal (relating to the Lord as one’s lover).

How can we leave this world and rejoin the family of Krishna? We declared our independence from God and He placed us within this world of birth and death. Now, if we surrender to Him, agreeing to act as He desires, making Him the object of our love, we will be accepted back into His association. In the Bhagavad-gita Krishna says: This divine energy of Mine (material nature) is difficult to overcome. But those who have surrendered unto Me can easily cross beyond it.

Surrender to Krishna means to become His servant and worshiper, always fully conscious of Him. Elsewhere in the Bhagavad-gita, Krishna says: Engage your mind always in thinking of Me, become My devotee, offer obeisances to Me and worship Me. Being completely absorbed in Me, surely you will come to Me.

It will all be tested at the time of death. We may do so many things throughout our lifetime, but our strongest aspiration will predominate at death. According to the state of the mind at the time of death, we are carried to our next body. In the Bhagavad-gita Krishna says: Whoever, at the end of his life, quits his body remembering Me alone at once attains My nature. Of this there is no doubt. Whatever state of being one remembers when he quits his body, that state he will attain without fail.

The state of the mind at the time of death is the culmination of a lifetime of thinking, feeling, willing, and acting. Krishna thus concludes: Therefore, you should always think of Me in the form of Krishna and at the same time carry out your prescribed duties. With your activities dedicated to Me and your mind and intelligence fixed on Me, you will attain Me without doubt.

In other words, if we really want to get out of material existence, which entails changing from one body to another, and rejoin God in His eternal realm, we should practice thinking of Him, by seeing everything in relation to Him while constantly engaging in His service. How to become a devotee of Krishna and engage in His service? We cannot do this without help and so Krishna recommends in the Bhagavad-gita: Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized souls can impart knowledge unto you because they have seen the truth.

Srila Prabhupada was undoubtedly a self-realized soul, and he founded the International Society for Krishna Consciousness to give everyone the opportunity of living a life with Krishna in the center. It is a fact that anything becomes easier when one has the association of like-minded people. Those who would like to drop everything else and dedicate themselves to whatever it takes to return to the association of the Lord can live in the association of devotees at an ISKCON center.

Of course, very few people will fully dedicate their lives to Krishna in this way, but everyone, in any position, can lead a godly life. While giving initiation, Srila Prabhupada would simply insist that his disciple chant the Hare Krishna mantra a prescribed number of times, known as sixteen rounds, and follow the four regulative principles—no eating of meat, fish, or eggs; no gambling; no intoxication; and no illicit sex (sex outside of marriage). He never said that a person had to live in an ISKCON center to attain life's goal, although he stressed that the association of devotees made advancement in Krishna consciousness far easier.

Although relatively few people will have the determination to strictly follow these principles, perhaps the majority of the people of the world will admire what has been presented in this book and thus have respect for those who actually live a godly life. At present we see that the people of the world, being in the bodily concept of life, have divided themselves in so many ways, in terms of race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, and political ideology. However, if we

understand what is taught in Simple Truth, we can easily see that such conflicts are artificial and could be avoided by a proper understanding of the self.

Besides these artificial divisions there is another, single division of society that is not artificial. In the Bhagavad-gita, Lord Krishna explains that there are always two classes of people in this world—those who accept His authority and those who do not. If you read Bhagavad-gita you will see that it is a conversation between Krishna and Arjuna on a battlefield. Krishna wanted Arjuna and his four brothers to rule the world and not their enemies, who opposed His authority. In the Bhagavad-gita Krishna says: To deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants, as well as to reestablish the principles of religion, I Myself appear, millennium after millennium.

At present almost everyone is more or less of a miscreant and so there is no question of a war between the godly and the godless. What should we do? Without neglecting the necessities of the body, we should make a heroic effort to convince the people of the world of the simple truths that were so nicely taught by Srila Prabhupada. When the number of such people becomes vast, they should demand that these simple truths be taught to the children in schools because, being innocent, they can very easily accept them.

Imagine all the people of the world who believe that every living being is the child of God and should therefore not be exploited, but rather nurtured. Imagine them united on the common platform of Simple Truth. Wouldn't that be a powerful group? Couldn't they conquer the godless persons that believe others should be exploited for their personal aggrandizement?

That Srila Prabhupada thought in such expansive terms is evident from this exchange between Srila Prabhupada and some of his disciples that took place while riding a train going to Kumbha-mela at Allahabad in 1977.

Ramesvara: Srila Prabhupada, should we be thinking in our minds that one day the Krishna consciousness movement will have to manage the cities and the nations of the world?

Prabhupada: Oh, yes.

Ramesvara: There are so many different departments in managing such a big thing. It requires a lot of . . .

Prabhupada: No, no. If people become Krishna conscious, then so many nonsense departments will be reduced.

Hari-sauri: Simplified.

Prabhupada: Yes. The sinful departments like illicit sex and meat-eating, they will be closed, and that will make it simple.

Ramesvara: Completely?

Prabhupada: No, at least we shall try to make them closed.

Srila Prabhupada especially abhorred the fact that the misconception that life evolved from matter has captured the minds of the majority of intelligent persons throughout the world. He formed the Bhaktivedanta Institute with his scientist-disciples and urged them to replace this mistaken idea with the understanding that life comes from life. While speaking about this with a leader of the Bhaktivedanta Institute, Srila Prabhupada said, "Make a great agitation. It will be done, if you work. The Bhaktivedanta Institute presents a great challenge to the whole world."

My dear friends, it can be done. Bring Simple Truth into you conversations with others. Very few will disagree with what you say. There is a "you" isn't there? Of course there is! Were the "you" that is now reading this book present in a childhood body many years before? Yes, you were there! But, the body that's holding this book did not exist in your childhood and so the simple truth is that you are not the body. You are an eternal conscious person covered by a body made of dull matter. Let the simple truth family grow!