

# ASHÉ!

2.4 / December 2003



*Dedicated to the memory of*  
Deborah F. Nilsen  
1951-2003



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# ASHÉ

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## Contributors

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**Dr. Payam Ghassemlou** is an Iranian gay man who helps others through sharing his life experiences. He is 37 and currently lives in Los Angeles where he works as a psychotherapist. Ghassemlou moved to the United States in 1982 and struggled for many years to come to terms with being gay. He hopes his work inspires others to find meaning inherent in being gay. He maintains the website: [iraniangaydoctors.com](http://iraniangaydoctors.com)

**Phil Hine** is a spiritual theorist noted for his ground-breaking work in the field of Chaos (Kaos) Magic. He is the author of several books including *Condensed Chas* and *Prime Chaos* from New Falcon and the now out of print *Pseudonomicon* from Dagon Productions. He is also the author of several e-books and numerous articles, many of which are available at his site: <http://www.phine.ndirect.co.uk>

**Miriam R. Sachs Martín** is hotter than flamin' hot cheetos, and wetter than the Lexington Reservoir. She loves to muck around in the place where poetry becomes intimacy and the word becomes song. She's a 5' \_" Cuban, Jewish dyke who loves East San José, where she lives, teaches ESL, produces *FIERCE WORDS TENDER* (Women's Open Mic @ Sisterspirit Bookstore, San Jose, [www.angelfire.com/de/fierceness](http://www.angelfire.com/de/fierceness)), and in every way worships things both feral and feline (purrrowrr!) Her work has been included in the anthologies *Cliterature*, *Gynomite*, and *Latino Heretics* and the journals *Gertrude*, *A Nest of Vipers*, *Sinister Wisdom*, *Sisterspirit News*, among others. She'd love to hear from all and sundry at [FierceMiri@aol.com](mailto:FierceMiri@aol.com).

**Pitambara das** was born in the north of Scotland on August 11th 1966 according to the Western calendar, or the 24th day of Purusottama-adhika Masa (the inter-calendarary month) in the year Gaurabda 480 according to the Gaudiya Vaisnava calendar. "As this month only occurs only every 3 years or so, by western calculation, next year will be my



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38th birthday, but by the Vaisnava calendar, I will be turning 12!!” He explored Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Celtic and Native American spirituality before discovering Krishna Consciousness in 1985. Since then it has been a game of hide and seek between The Lord and him, with Pitambara doing the hiding! He is living in a gay male body, and was diagnosed HIV positive in March 2001. Since then, his faith has dramatically deepened and he received initiation in June 2003 from His Divine Grace Srila Bhaktivedanta Narayana Goswami Maharaja in Birmingham, England.

**Rama Kesava dasa**, born in 1980, is a disciple of Swami B.V. Tripurari, one of the foremost western teachers of the Gaudiya Vaisnava lineage of Hinduism. He resides with his family near to Edinburgh, Scotland (UK), working for the Police, but reminisces about monastic life. In addition to writing articles regarding the politics of sexuality and sectarianism in his religious tradition, he is a director of the Gay and Lesbian Vaisnava Association (GALVA -- <http://www.galva108.org>), and a member of the editorial board of the online Vaisnava news service Chakra (<http://www.chakra.org>).

**Syamasundara dasa** is an early disciple of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada. He has recently returned to the U.S. after spending time teaching at a *gurukula* in India.

**Swami B.V. Tripurari** has spent over 30 years as a Hindu monastic. Awarded the sannyasa order in 1975, Swami Tripurari has studied under several spiritual masters in the Gaudiya lineage, notably AC Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and Bhakti Raksaka Sridhara Maharaja. Noted as the 'Thomas Merton of the modern bhakti tradition,' Swami Tripurari has authored a number of ground-breaking works.



## From the Editor

### If not now, when? If not here, where?

I have often heard Buddhist teachers remark that humans live as if they will live 500 years, while, in actuality, they could die tomorrow. You'll see this evidenced just by looking at those around you; you'll see this evidenced just by looking at yourself and the decisions that you make in each moment. We put off the big stuff to tomorrow, to get the little stuff done today. People all too often make choices, sacrificing their needs in the now, for their projected future—trading youth, family, spiritual life for hours of overtime and the envisioned future retirement, the sandy beach and handsome cabana boy.



This is evidence of what Buddhists refer to as the 'two truths,' conventional reality and ultimate reality. The conventional is that we live today for a better tomorrow; the relative is that tomorrow is never guaranteed. With a recent death in my immediate family, this contrast has been brought painfully home. When brought into sharp contrast, the choices that most of us make day-to-day, moment-to-moment, look amazingly (and ironically) shortsighted. You could die tomorrow. Sometimes that can be a joyous and empowering revelation. Keep that in your mind for just twenty-four hours and see how it nuances your decisions throughout the day.

I can tell you from my recent experience, most people think your nuts when you walk around with a shit-eating grin telling them that they could die tomorrow.

In the mortal words of Ms. Sally Bowles, "Start by admitting from cradle to tomb, it's isn't that long a stay. Life is a cabaret old chum. It's only a cabaret, old chum."

Another teaching that Buddhists like to use is the auspiciousness of one's current birth. In the simplest terms, if you are reading this (or any other spiritual material), or



listening to a master, Vaishnava saint, spiritual friend, etc., than you are in the best place you can be for your spirituality Right Now.

As Buddhist teachers love to remind one, just think how unlikely your birth was. Think how vast the Universe is... how many galaxies there are... how many solar systems in each galaxy... how many planets in each solar system. And you were lucky enough to be born on a planet fortunate enough to have a Buddha incarnate. What's the Vegas odds on that?

Think how many beings there are on just this little planet Earth—not just human beings, but animals, bird, fish and insects, even protozoa and bacteria. Add to that the other realms (at least within the Buddhist worldview) of Gods, demi-gods, ghosts, etc... Well, you get the point. There's a whole hell of a lot of beings you could have been born as and being born human, as Buddhists see it, makes you best positioned to get real spiritual work done.

While animal, demon, and ghost are obviously not the best states to be in, gods and demi-gods, though seemingly better births, are also not considered helpful for spiritual progress. To Buddhists, the higher realms of gods and demi-gods, where all desires are satiated, provide no impetus for spiritual practice. A certain amount of resistance is necessary for one to look toward spiritual study and contemplative practice. Human birth represents the most auspicious balance of resistance and fulfillment—a potential for friction from gain and loss.

So consider how fortunate we are to have this improbable birth on such a planet affording this potential with spiritual teachers and scriptural wisdom. Of all human beings currently incarnated on this planet, think how few actually have the fine balance of friction, fulfillment and intellect to manifest an interest in spiritual life. Of these spiritually interested individuals, not all gather the means and motivation to actively pursue their course of interest. Of these few motivated individuals, only a small number have the fortunate convergence of circumstance to come into contact with a spiritual teacher, sacred scripture or divine friend. Of these few fortunate ones, even fewer have sufficient capacity of attention to listen and receive what is being offered. Of the few who do listen, only a very small percentage actually apply what they hear to their practice in developing a spiritual life.

The Vegas odds are off the board at this point.

Just think for one moment on the nearly infinite improbability of you reading this—well, maybe not this, but the other material in this issue—and having the interest to check it out.



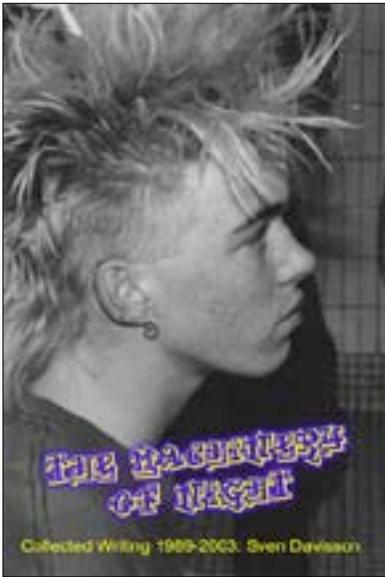
I have heard Geshe Lobzang Tsetan comment that it is simply a matter of respect not to squander this amazing opportunity afforded one—whether we individually consider it a gift of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the Universe or, simply, random circumstance.

It never hurts one’s spiritual development to take a step back and look at the decisions we are making today not in terms of how they affect tomorrow, planning for our idyllic future, but rather how they affect, or what they cost, the present moment. We live our lives as if we will live forever, while the opposite is the only guarantee we have. The only thing one really can say for sure is that our decisions affect us now, allowing that they may, depending on course, nuance our future. There is a paradoxical Zen teaching that, like the John Lennon song, karma is instant. The decisions one makes now affect one right now.

Living in the moment does not mean living for the moment. “Be Here Now” only means that you’re not there then.

“When you’re so committed to the future, it’s real easy to let your life right now turn to shit” Brad Warner in *Hardcore Zen*

Love light laughter,  
Sven

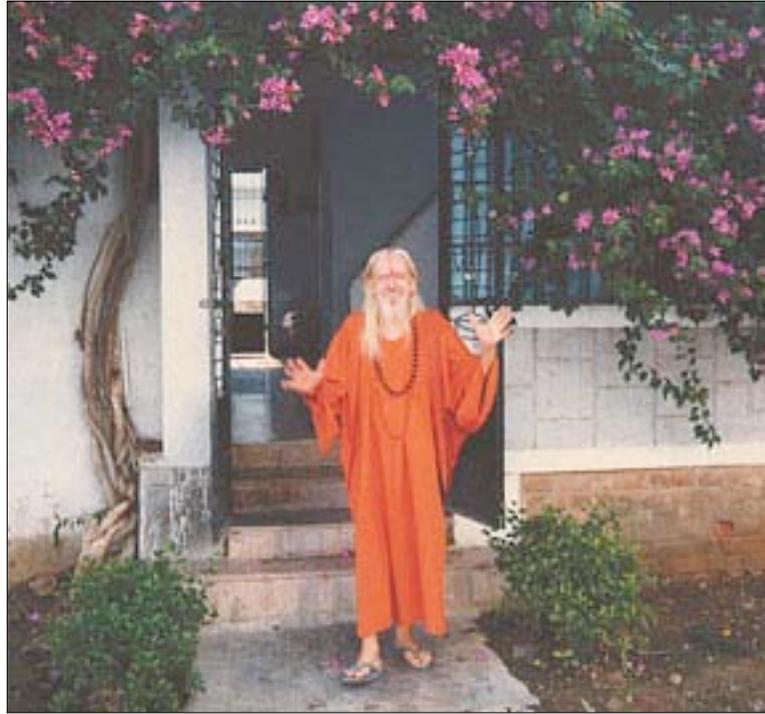


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**H.H. Shri Gurudev Mahendranath (Dadaji)**

was born in London, England in 1911. In 1953, he traveled to India and was given initiation as a sannyasin into the Adi-Nath Sampradaya by H.H. Shri Sadguru Lokanath, the Avadhoot of the Himalayas. Gurudev was later given Tantrik initiation by Shri Pagala Baba of Ranchi into the Uttarakaula sect of Northern Tantriks, and became his successor. During his life as a sannyasin, Shri Gurudev traveled extensively in Asia and received additional initiations in Soto Zen, Taoism, Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism.

Shri Gurudev Mahendranath is affectionately addressed by his disciples as “Dadaji.” His last residence was his hermitage - *Shambhala Tapowan*—near the Vatrak river, in the state of Gujarat, India.

Shri Gurudev Mahendranath entered Mahasamadhi on 30 August 1991.

Photo courtesy of the International Nath Order.



## **The Exegetikos**

*Shri Gurudev Mahendranath*

**The Lodestar and explicate of our way of life.**

**The Laboratory and working notes as guidelines to Think.**

**Being the terminal scribe scrawl of Shri Gurudev.**

The Nathas have or will find that most dynamic grouping come in fives or threes. Three is the most numerous especially in our basic magick structures.

Exempli Gratia: The eternity of deities, the spirit and cosmic energy expressed as “that which was, is and ever will be”. Subdivisions of time such as “Past, Present and Future.” The three states of creative mind; Insight, Intuition and Imagination, which form the ethereal vibration on which magick matures. The three evil delusions of mankind; Nationalism, Racism and Religion which separate and divide the human race into conflicting segments. The three jewels of human life; Peace, Freedom and Happiness.

Now we deal with the three keys to magick power as expressed in the Sanskrit words Iccha, Jnana, Kriya. Translated into simple English they mean, Iccha - power of the will. Jnana - wisdom and Kriya - decisive action.

The combination of these three, if correctly developed and united as a single cosmic power (Prakash Shakti) or their projection will be the manifestation of true magick power. To react with (another triad) People, Things and Ideas.

The will - as developed in a magician - has nothing to do with wishful thinking, daydreams or weak wonder. It comes to be in determination, force and power. In fact, one of the best synonyms of the will as used in magick, is found in the French expression, “Tour de Force”; meaning a feat, deed or action done with will, wisdom, strength or skill. This expression also helps to indicate the vital necessity of the three being used in combination and not separately or disunited. Cosmic power may be dynamic as a single power or thought projection even though the single elements are weak when separated and only lead to frustration.

In their collective development as latent occult powers the instructions already given are still essential and concentration, meditation and contemplation are still essential for this and other aspects of magick and occult development. This determines whether a latent human occult power will lie dormant or will awaken to power and illumination. Of



course, you cannot be successful in meditation development if the obstruction - blocks or five kleshas dominate your living or way of life.

The five kleshas must not be regarded as petty foibles, weaknesses or minor failings or amusing defects which can be considered for a short moment and then dismissed and forgotten. They form the foundation obstruction in Twilight Yoga as in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. They can cause us untold misery and suffering. Ego, which is usually put first not only puts us into conflict with others but can lead to premature death. When one develops and encourages the ego complex of an imagined self importance it is accompanied with constant pressure to maintain it and tension develops in the nerves and muscles because of our difficulty and failure to project ourselves as the superior image which we want others to see and feel. This constant tension and our failure produces defects which can result in heart failure and many other physical defects. Also, in magick powers; development must be modest and relaxed while in group work fraternity and harmony brings the best results. If qualities of a leader or master are real everyone will see and we do not have to act or propagate for them to know and recognize it. Hence, an ego can be destructive and not help us to success.

Ignorance builds up when we blindly accept information and neglect to give serious thought to details. Wisdom must be based on facts and clarity. Wisdom as understood by a Natha need not be wisdom as understood by ordinary people.

Kriya means the manipulation of molecules.

Jnana means wisdom born of thought and patient experimentation and conclusion.

Ichha means the mental thunderbolt which strikes its target.

Editors Note: For those interested in viewing digital copies of the original hand written manuscript, please visit: <http://www.mahendranath.org/~kapil/exegetikos.html>

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**Shri Kapilnath***Interviewed by Sven Davisson*

**Sven:** So Kapilnath, I understand that Mahendranath appointed you as the leader of the International Nath Order in 1989. You must have known him very well. What was he trying to do?

**Kapilnath:** Well Sven, I did know Shri Mahendranath well. During a period of about seven years I discussed with him all aspects of his teachings and intentions regarding his Nath Order, the International Nath Order. Shri Mahendranath is an interesting subject on many levels. He was not only a “westerner” who became the Guru of two ancient “eastern” sects, but he was also well acquainted with the spiritual and occult patterns of the West. His background in spiritual and occult pursuit ranges from his first pagan initiation at age 11 by his great-great-great Aunt “Clay” the Witch of Rottingdean England, to his discussions with Aleister Crowley. It was actually Crowley who suggested, that Shri Mahendranath then known as “Mr. Miles”; travel to India to seek further teachings and initiation. What Shri Mahendranath was trying to do in establishing the International Nath Order, (INO) was to recreate the lineage of Naths in a pattern of understanding and Attainment, which had all but vanished in Indian Nath sects. These ancient patterns he reasoned could only take rebirth in a new and perhaps more open minded land and environment.

**S:** The connection with Crowley is fascinating from a western occult perspective. What was the nature of their relationship?

**K:** Shri Mahendranath met Crowley during the latter’s widely publicized court case against Nina Hammet. They developed a rapport based on their mutual occult interests, discussed and played I understand, more than a few games of chess. Actually, Mahendranath and I discussed Crowley in some depth. A few of his revelations regarding Crowley might shine a new light on some of Master Therion’s writings. In any case, the important point for this interview, was the final opinion of Crowley that in order to learn more of the occult patterns of meditation, magick and Tantrika, Shri Mahendranath should travel to India to study with qualified Gurus.



**S:** I notice that you always refer to Shri Mahendranath. Wasn't the gentleman's last name "Miles"?

**K:** Yes it was, but he was given a new name at the time of Initiation. After reaching India in 1953, Mr. Miles was Initiated into the Adi Nath sect or Sampradaya as a Sannyasin and given the initiation name, Mahendranath. Towards the end of his life, Shri Mahendranath requested that as an author he be known and referred to as "Shri Gurudev Mahendranath".

**S:** Who is "Dadaji" then?

**K:** Well, Dadaji could be just about anyone. In India it is a bit like saying, "daddy", "granpa", "dear uncle", etc. It is a familiar colloquial term of endearment. Some of Mahendranath's disciples addressed him as such, but it is not really a proper name, per se.

**S:** Ok, now we have Shri Mahendranath. What was the Adi-Nath sect all about?

**K:** The Adi-Nath sect was one of several streams or sects of the greater Nath tradition. Fundamentally, the Naths looked toward Lord Shiva as a kind of prototype. In this sense they were Yogis like Shiva and dressed or even undressed as such. The "Ideal" of the Naths was the concept and attainment of the Avadhoot. This concept of Avadhoot, "The Unfettered One" is a subject worthy of an entire volume. It remains inside of Hindu or Sanatana Dharma as the highest goal of human life and experience. It is the natural Attainment of Unity between Macrocosm and Microcosm—the radical and natural union of the individual and Cosmic Spirit, the summation of the higher Yogas. Shri Mahendranath was initiated into the Adi Nath sect as a sannyasin or world renunciate, by Shri Lokanath the Avadhoot of UttaraKashi (Uttara Pradesh) India in 1953.

**S:** Wasn't Shri Mahendranath also the Guru of the Northern Tantriks, the Uttara Kaulas?

**K:** Yes, Shri Mahendranath was initiated as a sannyasin into the Uttara Kaulas by Pagala Baba and became his successor and Guru of the Order, as well as the Guru of the Adi Nath sect. Shri Mahendranath did not feel that being the Guru of two distinct sects to be the cause of any conflict in either theory or practice. In fact, it was his understanding that at an earlier time in history, the paths of Tantrika and the greater stream of the Naths,



including the Avadhoot tradition were all One. In this regard we must look back to what what was called the “Siddha” tradition. The Siddhas (Adepts) are a very ancient phenomena. They were not usually seen as a “sect” in as much as each “Siddha” or Adept who had attained represented only themselves. While the Siddhas were also an “initiatic” tradition, it was the success of a few Siddhas and their disciples over many generations, which showed and reflected the power and utility of lineage. It seems that the Nathas were a particular offshoot or manifestation of the Siddha traditon. The word “Siddha” is intended to refer to “one who has Attained”. This in itself reflects the idea of the prototypical Yogi Wizard of ancient India. The Nath tradition at the time of Matsendranath, typified a distinct manifestation of the Siddha lineage which reflected much of what is now thought of as Tantrika, the secret yogas and also held the ideal of the Avadhoot.

**S:** Did Shri Mahendranath indicate any reasoning why the more overt aspects of Tantrika were rejected by most Nath sects?

**K:** I think it fair to say that the Tantrik aspects referred to, largely relate to sexual expression or worship, particularly Shiva/Shakti or the he and she business. One way of explaining this is to remind that initiation into any “Guru” sect or initiatic lineage of this type involved the renunciation of the earth, heaven and celestial regions. In other words, one was only initiated into a sampradaya such as the Uttara Kaulas or Adi Nathas as a sadhu or sannyasin (world renouncer). An age old requirement of sannyasa was the observance of “brahmacharya”. This Sanskrit term actually means, absorbed in “Brahmin” or the Divine, (Cosmic Spirit). At some point, this term was given the meaning “celibate”. It can only be considered that changes in Indian society caused this new meaning to catch hold. The upshot of this change was that sadhus, sannyasins or holy men or woman with “consorts” were looked at with very crossed eyes. In other words, normal relations on sexual levels became forbidden. In this way, overtly “Tantrik” cults suffered a lot of bad public relations and went totally underground or were suppressed into oblivion. Most Nath sects in India today continue only as “celibate” sadhu orders. Part of the intention behind the International Nath Order was to put into motion a form of ancient Nathism which was not bound by the cultural traditions or superstitions of the land in which it was developed. Instead, the ideal was to pass along an ancient Guru lineage and focus on the functional elements of understanding, practice and Attainment that would lead us to success. This was also intended to make



the possibility of participation in an authentic and ancient initiatic lineage more accessible to those interested.

**S:** Did Shri Mahendranath pass on the traditions of the Adi Nath and Uttara Kaulas?

**K:** As discrete and distinct sadhu sects, Shri Mahendranath was the last and final Guru of both the Adi Nath and Uttara Kaula sects. In other words, the Adi Nath and Uttara Kaula sects died with him and became defunct. What he did pass on was the Guru tradition and initiation into the International Nath Order which was intended to be a non-sannyasin amalgamation of these two ancient lineages. Shri Mahendranath was very interested in seeing the seed wisdom, initiation and ancient lineage transplanted in new soil. As such, the INO is in no manner intended to be a “westernized” form of any “Hindu” sect. In the International Nath Order, English is the primary language and even Sanskrit is used as little as possible. While India was the birthplace and motherland of the Naths, it in no way has a “patent” or exclusive on wisdom or spiritual progress and Attainment.

**S:** I had thought that the Adi Nath sect and the Uttara Kaulas still existed in the West.

**K:** It was not Shri Mahendranath’s wish, will or intention to give the impression that the Adi Nath sect or the Uttara Kaulas continued after his death. Shri Mahendranath was the final Guru of both of these sects. I am aware that a few people claim otherwise, though this claim has been refuted by Shri Mahendranath since 1985. In an effort to clear up this matter, I wrote what I believe to be a discrete explanation entitled, “The Occult History of the Nath Order 1984-2003.” Actually, the “Occult History” is now in its second edition. The first version I wrote in my own words. After writing it, a number of people loudly suggested that I had made the story up. So, the current version consists of only an outline in my own words and uses digital scans of letters I received from Shri Mahendranath to tell the whole story. You can find the “History” on my personal web space at [www.mahendranath.org](http://www.mahendranath.org). Frankly Sven, the story isn’t pretty and I was loath to write about it. At the same time, I had received so many requests to explain the situation, I felt the need to create a document to refer people to. I simply got tired of telling the same story over and over. Since the second version of the “History” no one has publicly questioned its authenticity or brought forward any evidence that suggests or supports a different version of events.



**S:** Does this mean that there is now no renunciate tradition inside of the International Nath Order?

**K:** Initiates of the INO are free to renounce whatever they feel is important to renounce. There are however, no vows made at the time of initiation that require one to renounce anything. Initiates of the INO are encouraged to renounce the five Kleshas (or Obstructions): Ignorance, Ego, Repulsion, Attachment and Clinging to Life. One's success with the renunciation of these few obstructions has much to do with the individual's progress, both spiritually and inside the INO. We probably shouldn't forget that the purpose of renunciation, in any form or formality, was to bring us closer to the Divine.

**S:** Does the Nath tradition carried forward by Shri Mahendranath maintain a historical Satguru tradition similar to other sects of Shaivism? If so, how has this tradition been changed in the movement of the Adi Nath and Uttara Kaula sects to the West.

**K:** The idea and reality of lineage and lineage holder remains important. The Naths have been and remain a Guru-centric initiatic lineage. This means that "something" has been passed down and maintained from individual to individual. What is being passed down has little to do with quaint customs, the "book" of holy sayings or even the secret decoder ring. It has much more to do with the spiritual vibration of a Cosmic Continuum, which includes the connection with the Spiritual predecessors of the line. This connection is an unbroken living thing. It is a vital relationship between the past and the present, the earthly and spiritual realms. I think on functional levels, little has changed. On human social levels I think that current patterns reflect a great lessening of formalities and social role playing.

**S:** I've visited Shri Mahendranath's website at [www.mahendranath.org](http://www.mahendranath.org). Do you have plans to expand its current content?

**K:** Yes, we do plan to include practically all of Shri Mahendranath's writings on the website. As it is, most of the major writings are already up and available for download in many file formats for personal study and use. We also have an e-list or mailing list. This e-list is to announce the publication of new works and also a forum for people to ask questions and discuss the INO and the writings of Shri Mahendranath. All of this is offered freely for interested people. The main idea is to create a webspace where people



from all over the globe can get a chance to know more about the INO from their own computer terminals, at their own pace and time.

**S:** What is the “initiation” into the INO and why is it important?

**K:** By definition, an initiation is the start of something. In the case of the INO, it is looked at as a part of a process. The first thing is for the individual interested in the INO to contact an initiated member of the INO and begin to develop some rapport with that person. This primary contact is probably the best way to learn more and a chance to discuss and exchange ideas. If the individual is still interested in initiation, they must request it from the person they are in contact with. The Nath who has received the request for initiation evaluates the persons potential. After the request has been made, at some point, it is made known whether or not the initiation is going to happen and if so, when. It is then the responsibility of the person seeking initiation to travel and meet their Nath correspondent.

The Initiation itself is in the form of a rather simple ritual. The details of this are discussed with the Candidate prior to Initiation. The main aspect of the Initiation is a mind/spirit transmission. This transmission is the vital link and experience of an ancient lineage and Cosmic Continuum. That is, the Initiation is a link to and with the current Adepts, those of the distant past and the Cosmic Spirit. The utility of such a link on magickal levels should not be underestimated. If the new Nath is able to properly align with the agencies of lineage, present and past, swift progress is likely. Many of the finest exponents of the INO do not currently reside in a physical body.

**S:** Who would benefit by contact with the INO?

**K:** This is very difficult to say really. I would like to say that everyone could benefit, but this is neither completely true nor practical. I do think that many people could benefit from a closer look at the core values and teachings of the INO. At the same time, the INO is not for everyone. While the INO is extremely simple in all matters, it is also difficult. A host of specific qualities and karmas are needed to get very far. Nonetheless, the INO remains open to all who are interested. Where there is a will there is a way.

**S:** Is the Initiation a form of Kundalini Awakening then?



**K:** I religiously avoid the term Kundalini. In the broader scope of Tantrika and the Naths, Kundalini is a rather modern term. It has also been written about repeatedly in modern times and not all of this information is very useful. Ancient Naths referred only to the “Shakti”. This term means in essence, “energy” and is not confined in proper understanding to be only an inner energy. The “Shakti” is conferred at Initiation and is to be understood as just as much outer as inner. The point or crux of understanding the distinction is that it is the limited perceptual mechanism, which creates the condition of “inner” and “outer”. While there are inner processes, no small part of the goal is to experience and understand the union of microcosm and macrocosm. In this sense, and as a part of ancient tradition, the term Kundalini is deprecated in the INO.

**S:** Can you say a few words about MAGIKOS.

**K:** Yes, MAGIKOS is the decision making body of the INO. It is comprised of only the most developed of the INO initiates. Shri Mahendranath instituted this prior to his mahasamadhi (death). While I remain the current leader of MAGIKOS and my voice has considerable weight, all decisions made by MAGIKOS that effect the INO are discussed and then decided by democratic vote. MAGIKOS remains a secret Order. It has some specific functions outside of the administration of the INO, but these aspects remain secret as does the identity of its members. The membership of MAGIKOS includes the influence of spirits of the supreme substance no longer exclusively inhabiting the earth plane. It is the inner court and truly spiritual core of the INO.

**S:** How do you see the future of the INO?

**K:** I see a concord of delightful men and woman working together in harmony toward progress and the supreme Awakening. I see a group of powerful Adepts working to facilitate that this vision unfolds. I think that is enough to say or see. Thank you for your interest and this interview Sven.



## **Nesting**

*Miriam R. Sachs Martin*

One thing about teaching is that I find myself engaging with language in new ways, enjoying intimacies I hadn't previously known. I have to act everything out, so it becomes imprinted in my body: how large is the same as big, but different from small. I have to articulate subtleties that I hadn't previously named...Today someone asked me "What's the difference between hope and wish?" What IS the difference? Wish is less grounded, less likely. Well then, when do you say wish, when hope, and when do you say dream? I try to answer well, but there is a poem in all this. In my morning class, acting out "she gave the cookies to ME and I gave the cookies to HIM". Object pronouns. A song, if you will, if you know how to listen. I refuse to turn on the air conditioner and we laugh and get bored and fan ourselves. I get cranky, they flirt with each other incorrigibly, I try again to engage them, to win their understanding, to create that click. There is a poem in that too, like there is a poem in the lungs expanding and contracting with each breath.

It's hot hot hot and my condo complex smells like perfume all over from the different flowers and trees and leaves. A bunch of pathway lights are burnt out and the heat has driven people outside of their pretty apartments, to sit on their steps and smoke, like real people, talk in different languages, wander around in the night air with their children. Windows splayed open set free smells of food I don't know how to cook and the babble of languages I can't speak or understand. They waft along the perfumed heat of azahares and jasmine. It's finally starting to feel like a place I can call home. Maybe I will sit on the grass tomorrow and shell peas for soup, take off my school clothes, put on a summer top and act like I really live here.

I am running every day - five minutes, or ten, which is five or ten more minutes than I ran last month, or for that matter, for the last couple of years. I run, stretch, walk, meditate, run, sprint, stretch, walk, race home, take a shower, and go to night class. My body loves it, feels so grateful, asks for more and a little more. I listen to her, run not for the sake of running, but in a running meditation instead, each footfall planting a flower on the earth, each gasp of hot summer air a poem.



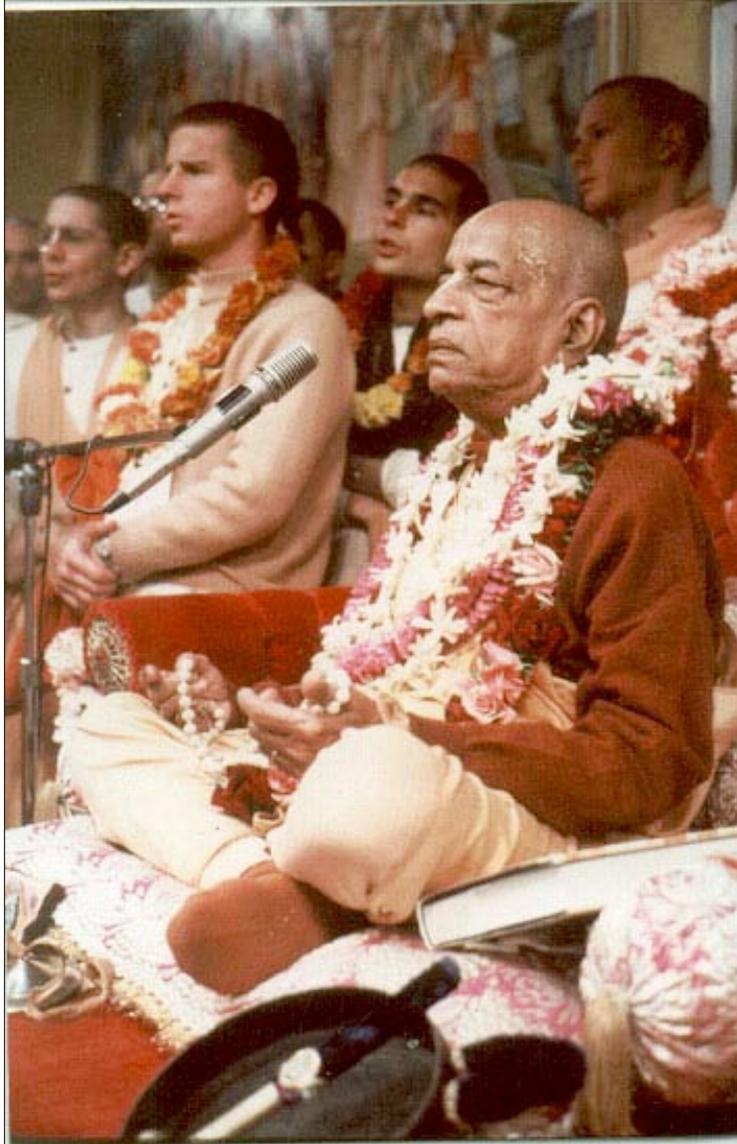
**Anidando: 4***Miriam R. Sachs Martin*

Algo que he notado al enseñarle inglés a adultos, es que me encuentro tratando con el lenguaje en nuevas maneras; gozando intimidades que no había previamente conocido. Tengo que realizar todo físicamente, para que se impriman palabras en mi cuerpo: como feliz es lo mismo que alegre, pero diferente que triste. Tengo que pensar en diferencias finitas que no había previamente articulado. Hoy una alumna me preguntó “Cuál es la diferencia entre esperanza y deseo?” Cuál ES la diferencia? Esperanza es menos fundada, menos probable. Bueno, entonces cuándo se dice esperanza, cuándo se dice deseo, y cuando utilizamos sueño? Trato de contestar bien, pero hay un poema en todo eso. En mi primera clase del día, ejecutando “ella me dió los dulces A MI, y yo SE LOS di A EL. Pronombres. Una canción, si tu quieres, si sabes como escuchar. Me niego a prender el aire acondicionado, y nos reímos, y nos aburrimos, y nos abanicamos con las manos. Me pongo fastidiada, ellos coquetéan uno con el otro sin cesar, yo trato una y otra vez de ocuparlos, de ganar su entendimiento, de crear ese “encaje”. Hay un poema en esto, como hay un poema en los pulmones que se dilatan y se contraen con cada respiración.

Está super caliente y mi complejo de condominios huele al perfume de las diferentes flores y árboles y hojas. Muchas de las luces de afuera se han fundido y el calor ha arrastrado la gente fuera de sus apartamentos ordenaditos, para sentarse en sus sillas y fumar, como gente real, hablar en diferentes idiomas, vagar por la noche con sus hijos. Ventanas abiertas liberan a olores de comidas que yo no se cocinar y a un balbucéo de idiomas que no puedo hablar ni entender. Estos llevan a flote el calor perfumado de azahares y jasmín. Al fin está comenzando a sentirse como un lugar que puedo llamar “mi hogar”. Quizas me sentaré en la yarda mañana a desvainar chícharos para sopa, quitarme mi ropa profesional y ponerme una camiseta; comportarme como si realmente viviera aquí.

Estoy saliendo a correr todos los días—cinco minutos o diez; son cinco o diez minutos más de los que corrí el mes pasado, o, hasta, en los años pasados. Mi cuerpo lo adora, se siente tan agradecido, me pide más y un poquito más. Yo le hago caso y corro, no solamente por correr, sino como una meditación, cada paso sembrando una flor en la tierra, cada respiro de aire caliente un poema.





**His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada**  
*Founder-Acarya of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness*  
(Swami B.V. Tripurari visible in background)



## Krishna Consciousness

### Founding Archarya

Most of the emails I receive from Krishna devotees begin by asking obeisances from Shrila Prabhupada often appending an honorific acknowledging his role in establishing the Krishna Consciousness movement. It is certainly true that without this one small Indian gentleman's trip from India to the United States Vaishnavism would likely not have become such an influence as a movement in the West.

Shrila Prabhupada was born in Calcutta, India in 1896. He took initiation from his spiritual master Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati in 1932 and formally dedicated his life to teaching Vedic wisdom. In 1944 he started publishing an English-language magazine *Back to Godhead*, which continues to be produced by his disciples to this day. Shrila Prabhupada entered the renounced order of sannyas in 1959.

In 1965, he sailed for America landing nearly penniless in Boston on his way to New York City. He began preaching on the Bowery and uptown. He eventually found his way to the Lower East Side and the youth revolution that was beginning there. By the first anniversary of his arrival he had opened a storefront temple at 26 Second Avenue sandwiched between a Laundromat and a warehouse. It was there that he founded the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON).

By his death in 1977, he had tirelessly translated numerous volumes of Vedic literature into English and thousands had joined his quickly growing movement.

### Gaudiya Vaishnava

Gaudiya-Vaishnava is one of five Vaishnava schools that emerged in India during the middle ages. Gaudiya-Vaishnavism stems from the teachings of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, born in Mayapura during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Lord Chaitanya is considered to be an actual incarnation of Shri Shri Raddha and Krsna, the Divine Couple. He traveled and taught simply the love of God extending particular attention to those peoples shunned or neglected by the religious institutions of his day.

Chaitanya taught pure devotion to God (*prema-dharma*) emphasizing the chanting of God's holy name, known as the *maha mantra*:



“Hare Krishna Hare Krishna  
Krishna Krishna Hare Hare  
Hare Rama Hare Rama  
Rama Rama Hare Hare”

Lord Chaitanya left only eight written instructions contained in eight *slokas* (verses) known as *Siksastaka*. His teachings were carried on by his closest followers known as the six Gosvamis and their successors in unbroken lines to the present day in such figures as Shрила Prabhupada and his godbrothers.

“Glory to the Sri Kṛṣṇa *sankirtana*, which cleanses the heart of all the dust accumulated for years and extinguishes the fire of conditional life, of repeated birth and death. This *sankirtana* is the prime benediction for humanity at large because it spreads the rays of the benediction moon. It is the life of all transcendental knowledge. It increases the ocean of transcendental bliss, and it enables us to fully taste the nectar for which we are always anxious.” first *sloka* of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu



Jagannatha, his brother Balaram and sister Subhadra (Rama Kesava dasa)



### The Four Regulative Principles

Central to Shрила Prabhupada’s teachings are four basic admonitions, known as the “four regulative principles.” The first: a vegetarian diet based on Vedic knowledge avoiding meat, eggs, fish and certain other items such as onion, mushrooms and garlic. The second: No gambling as this induces unhealthy excitement, elevates passions and increases anxiety. The third: Avoidance of intoxicants such as drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine. The fourth: Avoidance of illicit sex, generally understood to be sex outside of marriage or committed relationships.

These four core instructions do not represent the notion of “sin” as understood by Western religious systems. They instead present an understanding that certain activities increase one’s identification and attachment to the body and the empty, deluding pleasures of the material world.

### Devotional Service

“Renunciation means not to try to give up this world but to work in this world and give the fruits of our work to the service of Krsna.” Shрила Pabhupada (Dharma 34)

In addition to the four regulative principles, noted above, devotees observe other important aspects of their spiritual life. Important among these is the notion of devotional service, the understanding that all positive activities one engages in are undertaken for the benefit of Krishna. Work is performed to acquire the minimum necessary for the devotee to sustain himself/herself and provide for his/her continued service to Lord Krishna. All excess beyond that necessary for the devotee’s life is given over to Krishna. Like Arjuna in his chariot on the battlefield, the devotee of Krishna does not simply drop out of the world. He instead performs his work within the material world in accord with his nature, ability and circumstance, dedicating all the fruits of that work to the Lord.

“Work done as a sacrifice for Visnu [Krishna] has to be performed. Otherwise work binds one to the material world.” *Bhagavad-gita* 3.9



### **Prasadam**

“When a devotee distributes *prasada*, remnants of food offered to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, in order to maintain our spirit of devotional service we must accept this *prasada* as the Lord’s grace received through the pure devotees. We should also invite pure devotees to our home, offer them *prasada* and be prepared to please them in all respects.” (Nectar 39)

Many devotees’ first introduction to Krishna has been at the meals, known as *prasada*, served at the Sunday feasts held at Krishna temples and at larger festivals throughout the world. These feasts continue to attract the young and counter-cultural just as they did when Shрила Prabhupada began offering *prasada* in the Lower East Side in 1966.

The food, prepared by devotees in accord with Vedic knowledge, is first served to Lord Krishna and consort. After the Lord is given time to partake of the offered food, it is then offered to the guests gathered in the house that Shрила Prabhupada built—his temples and larger community of devotees.

### **Chant & Be Happy**

“One in Krsna consciousness is truly learned, and thus he sees cats and dogs and human beings equally. He doesn’t see outward dress of the body but sees the spirit soul. ‘Here is a spirit soul,’ he thinks ‘part and parcel of Krsna.’ That kind of vision is the basis of universal brotherhood.” (Dharma 94)

The most important practice taught by Lord Chaitanya and carried to the West by Shрила Prabhupada is the simple chanting of the Lord’s name contained in the form of the *Maha Mantra* (above). This chanting when performed alone is known as *japa* and when done in a group is *kirtana*.

*Japa* is chanted in rounds of 108 counting each mantra recitation on a string of prayer beads, known as a *mala*, usually made of the sacred plant Tulsi. A set of attached counter beads allows one to keep track of completed rounds.

When Shрила Prabhupada first introduced the practice of *japa* to his early disciples in New York, they thought it impossible to chant the number of rounds he proposed as a minimum for daily practice. After some discussion, Prabhupada ultimately stated that 16 was the absolute minimum number of daily rounds.



**Further Introductory Reading:**

*Bhagavad Gita As It Is*, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

*Krsna: The Supreme Personality of Godhead*, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

*Dharma: The Way of Transcendence*, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

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Mahatma dasa, "Krishna Consciousness at Home." in *Dharma: The Way of  
Transcendence*, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: Los  
Angeles, 1998, pp. 113-125.

Satsvarupa dasa Goswami, *Prabhupada: He Built a House in Which the Whole World  
Can Live*. Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: Los Angeles, 1983.



### **Krsna: The Supreme Personality of Godhead (Deluxe Edition)**

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada  
(Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 2003, 844pp, \$49.95)

Shrila Prabhupada's *Krsna* first appeared in 1970 and has been issued in several different editions over the years—both as two and three volumes sets. The first single volume edition issued in the 1990's was simply a consolidation of earlier editions without change to text or form. The new edition of *Krsna* issued last year by Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT) is the first completely new edition of this work since it first appeared.

Even before opening its covers, one cannot help but be impressed by the beauty of this edition. The book is simply one of the finest examples of modern publishing in recent years. The book is solid, the pages printed on high quality paper and not "Bible" paper. Even the dust-jacket with its watercolor cover, gold foil highlighting and soft matte spine is beautiful to behold.



Prabhupada's *Krsna* is a summary and discussion of the tenth canto of Shrila Vyasadeva's *Srimad Bhagavatam*. Often called the "Biography of God" this is the inside story of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and his pastimes. The work tells of his adventures, demonic confrontations, romances and playful encounters. The book includes discussion of his advent on Earth, his adolescence in Vrndavan through to his founding of the city Dvaraka.

For this edition BBT commissioned Lithuanian artist Devaki Dasi to create 77 new illustrations to accent Prabhupada's text. Devaki Dasi spent several years creating a poignant and inspiring collection of original images. Her technique employing watercolor and India ink is perfectly suited to the content and context of the work. The drawings give the impression of traditional Indian batik over block printing. Each has the feel of sacred tapestries that could easily adorn a temple's wall. Devaki Dasi's images have a sweetness that makes them highly suitable as accompaniment when retelling the story of *Krsna* to children.

This edition of *Krsna* is more than a highly artistic repackaging of the text of previous editions. BBT went back to the source tapes containing Prabhupada's original



dictation and verified the transcription word-for-word. Due, no doubt, to Prabhupada's heavily accented English, numerous errors in transcription were found. The new edition thus brings us the authentic text of Prabhupada's original intended work for the first time.

In addition to the beautiful book itself, the work also contains a poster-size map of ancient India and a multi-media CD. The map allows one to visually track the relative location of Krsna's past-times. The companion CD, which works on both PC and Mac platforms, contains a study quiz, a multi-media telling of the story of the Syamantaka Jewel (narrated by Krpamoya dasa), Shрила Prebhupada singing the Maha Mantra and giving a talk on its meaning, Krsnaprema dasa singing the Maha Mantra, and the complete book in PDF format.

All the improvements taken as a whole, this edition of *Krsna* is the definitive and academically rigorous edition of this classic work.

At a minimum, this and Prabhupada's *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* should be components of any spiritual seeker's library.



### Ratha Yatra London 2003

*Rama Kesava dasa*



ॐ

**Ratha Yatra**, also known as the festival of the chariots, is a celebration of Lord Jagannatha, Lord of the Universe (Kṛṣṇa). Central to the festival is a large street procession featuring floats resembling traditional Indian temples. The floats carry the three deities Jagannatha, his brother Balaram and sister Subhadra. The festival originated in the state of Orissa in eastern India. It was brought to the West when Shri Prabhupada and his Society organized the first Ratha Yatra in San Francisco, 1967. Now the festival occurs in cities throughout the world from London, New York, San Francisco, Hawaii to Sydney.



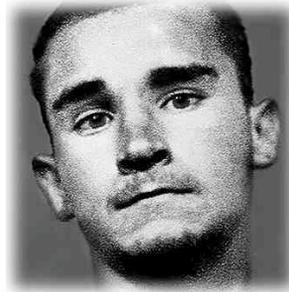
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## The Play of Violence

Swami B.V. Tripurari

When we portray violence in a drama none of the actors are actually hurt. It is only play. Perhaps if we could stand back from the drama of everyday life and view it as if it were just that, a drama to which we are only a witness, we could better understand the violence in our lives, and



from the vantage point of the soul we could see that no one really gets hurt. This is precisely what the *Bhagavad-gita* advocates, and from the position of witnessing the human drama rather than being caught up in it, Sri Krsna invites us to exit the theater of the human drama and accept a role in another drama--the play of God (*lila*).

The play of God is the larger circle within which the drama of humanity appears as a smaller circle. However, the larger circle of God's play occasionally appears within the smaller circle of humanity to convey mystic insight into the nature of both of these dramas. The *Bhagavad-gita* is a prime example of this.

Krsna's counsel in the *Bhagavad-gita* represents the most concentrated segment of time he spends on directly instructing humanity throughout his entire play on earth. From it we learn all that we need to know about the drama of human life. We learn the mystery of how inaction can be action, how nonviolence within humanity can be violence. We also learn all we need to know about God's play to prepare ourselves for a role within it, including the mystery of how action can be inaction, how violence within God's play can be nonviolence.<sup>1</sup> The mystery surrounding God's descent within humanity is discussed at the beginning of the *Gita's* fourth chapter. In his introductory remarks Krsna explains things about himself that make his Godhood apparent to Arjuna. Arjuna understands that his dear friend is God himself mystically appearing within the world as if he were a player in the human drama. The *Gita* thus explains the principle of the *avatara*. Understanding this principle is foundational to understanding the nature of the *yogic* war--the Battle of Kuruksetra--that Krsna implores Arjuna to participate in.



Krsna begins chapter 4 by explaining the history of the science of yoga and his own participation in its dissemination, which involves his instructing the sun god Vivasvan thousands of years before. His statement creates a doubt in Arjuna's mind and thus Arjuna questions his friend and mentor.

“Arjuna said: ‘You took birth long after Vivasvan was born. How then am I to understand that you instructed him previously?’”<sup>2</sup> By asking about Krsna's apparent recent human birth in contrast with the ancient celestial birth of the sun god at the dawn of creation, Arjuna paves the way for Krsna to enlighten him about his omniscience, his eternality, and the mystic nature of his appearance in this world.

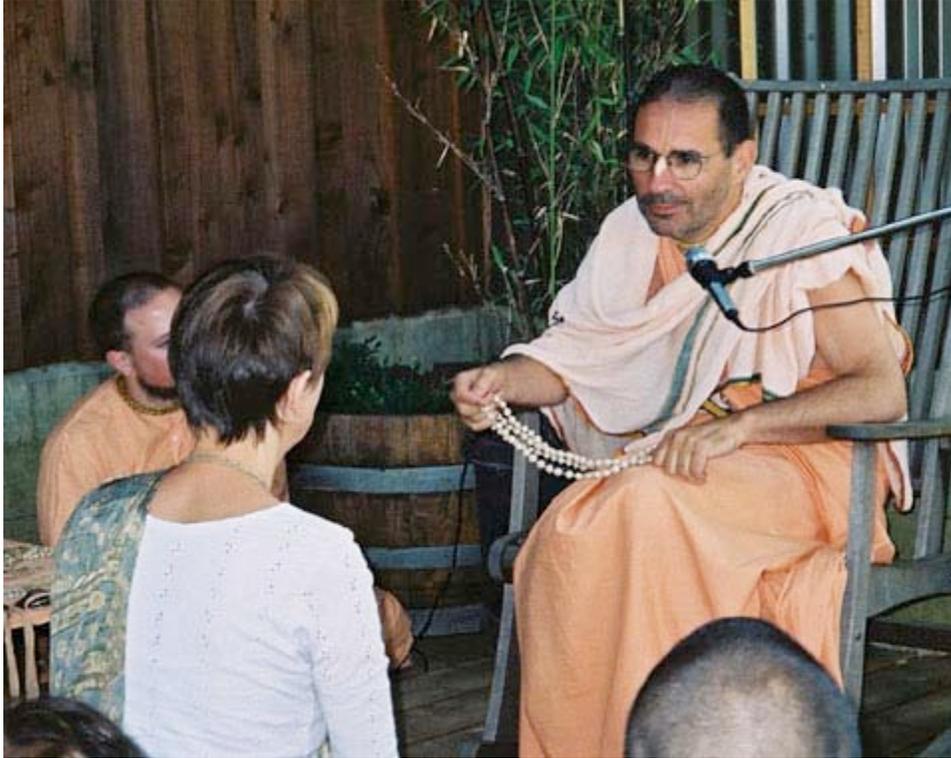
“The Lord of Sri said: ‘Arjuna, both of us have passed through many births. I know all of them, whereas you, subduer of enemies, do not. Although I am the controller of all beings, nevertheless, remaining in control of my material energy, I manifest by my own inner power.’”<sup>3</sup>

Here verse 6 is particularly significant. Krsna says that his descent is under the jurisdiction of his primary potency (*atma mayaya*)<sup>4</sup> and that when he descends he remains in control of his secondary potency, material nature (*prakrtim svam*).<sup>5</sup> This is significant because it tells us that God, while descending, remains aloof from the governing influence of the human drama--material nature. Furthermore, we learn that God has a special mystic potency that causes his descent.

This special potency is God's primary potency that governs all of his personal activities and those of his perfected devotees.<sup>6</sup> It is his own personal power constituting his essence or intrinsic nature (*svarupa*). God's play comes under the jurisdiction of his primary potency, even when it appears within the smaller circle of our human drama, and it is never influenced by his secondary potency over which he has full control. It is independent of the laws of material nature even when functioning within nature. From it--God's play--we can expect miracles on earth. As we shall see, the Battle of Kuruksetra involves such miracles. Arjuna's participation in it also requires nothing short of a miracle, for he must become God-like himself.

The *Bhagavad-gita* teaches us what this entails. The starting point is detachment from the fruits of one's work, because God's play is not based on the erroneous reading of material manifestations that arises from attachment to them. The extent to which one is attached to an object is as much as one's eye of objectivity is obscured. Thus detachment reveals the nature of the world and the necessity to witness it rather than wallow in it. Furthermore, genuine detachment arising from mystic insight makes one aloof from the influence of material nature and it is thereby the basis of nonviolent life within God's play.<sup>7</sup>





Before discussing God's play further, let us first examine the nature of material attachment within the human drama and how it fosters violence even when it speaks of nonviolence. We shall also look at the task before Arjuna in the *Gita* and see how his initial advocacy of nonviolence actually constitutes violence. We will discuss how the entire *Bhagavad-gita* advocates transcending material attachments and the violence they involve for the sake of entering into God's play and a life of absolute nonviolence. In returning to God's play, we will examine the Battle of Kuruksetra in particular, which is an excellent example of nonviolence within violence under the jurisdiction of God's mystic potency.

While God's play involves detachment, the human drama is based on attachment. According to the *Gita*, attachment to the fruit of one's work is the basis of exploitation and thus violence.<sup>8</sup> In this condition, the soul thinks itself to be the doer of acts that are in reality performed by material nature.<sup>9</sup> Thus it lives in a virtual reality under the stern hand of the karmic law that governs both the psychic and the physical plane. It is the soul's material desire or attachment that causes material nature to react and imprison the soul in its karmic web.



Attached to and thus identified with matter, units of consciousness imagine necessities that in fact are only relative to matter. While the soul is eternal, it struggles with the threat of death when identified with matter, for the material manifestation it has identified with is not enduring. Under karmic law the soul moves out of a necessity born of material identification.

Because the body has needs, those who identify with it feel needy themselves. We live in the human drama at the cost of others. Here everyone is on the take. One living being is food for another. Short of realizing this predicament and making a comprehensive solution to it, our giving is tinged with getting, our nonviolence with violence. In this plane we must kill in order to live, however politely.

In the human drama, people are their attachments. Desire makes the world of *samsara* go 'round. The task that the *Gita* lays before us is to slay our attachments and extinguish the material desire that generates the human drama. It asks us to die an ego death to live without struggle, to be free from violence and all forms of exploitation. Our identification with matter, our material ego, must die if our soul is to have a life of its own. This is what Krsna asks of Arjuna: to slay his material ego. While Arjuna, due to his material attachments and subsequent identity based on those attachments, hears Krsna asking him to fight against his own relatives, in reality Krsna asks him to slay his attachments and thus free his soul.

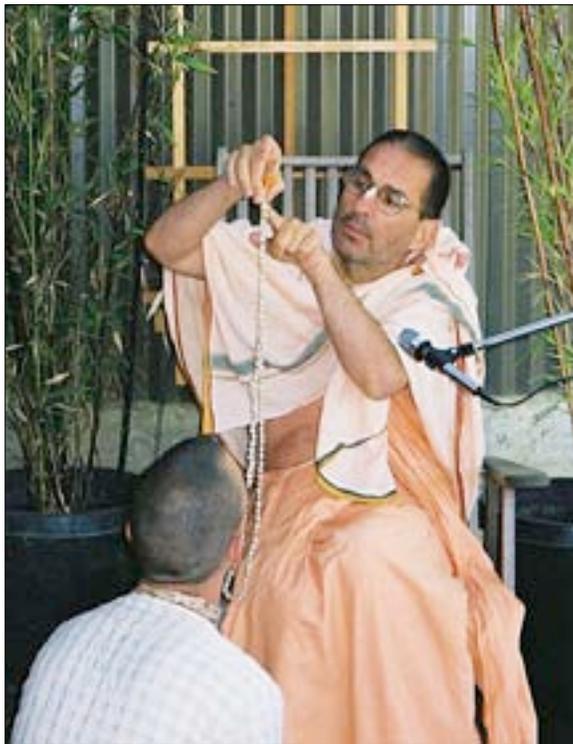
Arjuna speaks eloquently in the first chapter of the *Gita*, advocating inaction and nonviolence in the face of a great fratricidal war. But before doing so, he asks Krsna to drive his chariot between the two armies so that he can see who has assembled to fight. Krsna does so, commenting that both armies are one--Arjuna's relatives, the Kurus.<sup>10</sup> Krsna stops Arjuna's chariot in front of Bhishma and Drona for good reason. These two personify Arjuna's greatest attachments. They represent his entire martial career and his closest family ties, Drona being his military guru and Bhishma his grandfather who took the place of his deceased father in raising him. By stopping Arjuna's chariot in front of these two warriors whom Arjuna will have to fight against, Krsna, in his first act of the *Gita's* drama, speaks loudly to us about the nature of material attachment and its power to distort reality. All of Arjuna's arguments for nonviolence, however well-reasoned and however valid under different circumstances, amount to a grand rationalization arising from material attachment. He is unwilling to dismantle his identity within the human drama when the time to do so arrives of its own accord on God's schedule.

Arjuna speaks of compassion and despair at the thought of the violence such a war will entail. The thought of fighting with his relatives makes him feel as though he is losing his mind. He does not see how any good can come from the battle. He feels that



while others may be overwhelmed by greed for a kingdom and thus prepared to fight, he is not. He argues on the basis of the importance of preserving family tradition, religious principles, and so on.<sup>11</sup> He concludes that pacifism is the best course: “It would be better to be killed unarmed and unresisting.”<sup>12</sup> Again, all good points, were they not raised in this particular context.

The context is that Arjuna is seated before God in the midst of his play intended to deliver Arjuna from the illusory human drama. Appropriately, God’s play places Arjuna before all of his material attachments that make up his role in the human drama. Arjuna is the military disciple of Drona and the grandson of Bhisma. Materially speaking, we are our attachments, and slaying them is what is involved in dismantling our illusory, fleeting, material persona, which is a prerequisite for landing our role in the eternal play of God.



Arjuna’s reluctance to fight and advocacy of inaction or nonviolence are not only grand rationalizations for maintaining material attachment, from the vantage point of God’s play they are an expression of violence. His overt inaction and nonviolence are subtle forms of passive aggression. They are violence to the soul because they implicate him further in karmic bondage. Everything belongs to God, and when we imagine things as belonging to ourselves, we not only deny the proprietorship of God, we turn others into objects of our sense indulgence and emotional needs, viewing them through the lens of our imagined mental/sensual identity. We reinforce the illusory roles we and other souls play in the human drama at the cost of self-realization and a role in God’s play.

From a purely spiritual perspective, the human drama is ultimately self-destructive. While consciousness animates matter, the subsequent movements of matter



obscure the fact that consciousness is its animator. Consciousness is thus lost to itself. When a person acts such that he completely obscures his potential, forgetting who he is, we call this act of violence self-destruction. Thus from the vantage point of God's play, the extent to which one is not involved in transcending God's secondary potency one renders the entire human drama an act of self-destruction.

This is not to say that nonviolence within the human drama is worse than overt violence. The *Gita* considers nonviolence a godly quality,<sup>13</sup> one that should develop in a person who is cultivating spiritual life. Arjuna, however, is a *ksatriya*, a warrior. In the socio-religious scheme of the *Gita*, qualified violence has a place in the political arena. It is considered religious for a warrior to fight for a religious cause. But the *Gita*, while arising out of this socio-religious framework, is ultimately not about a socio-religious orientation to life. From the purely spiritual vantage point of the *Gita*'s conclusion, even religious life aimed at material remuneration in this life and heavenly attainment in the next is a form of exploitation and violence to the soul.

The vast majority of people do not read the *Gita* for directions on socio-religious life, but rather for inspiration in spiritual life. In the *Bhagavad-gita*, such socio-religious life is only mentioned in passing, with at best a view to emphasize the fact that spiritual life has at its foundation dutiful, responsible living. In the entire *Bhagavad-gita*, there are only eight out of seven hundred verses in which Krsna directly encourages Arjuna to fight because it is the religious duty of a warrior to do so.<sup>14</sup> These verses appear only because Arjuna argued that it would be irreligious to fight the war, and even in replying to Arjuna's mistaken notion, Krsna concludes this section of verses with an advocacy of yoga.<sup>15</sup> When understood in context, any other verses in the *Gita* that appear to advocate the righteousness of a religious type of war are clearly addressing a particular stage of yogic spiritual pursuit that Krsna wants Arjuna to engage in.<sup>16</sup>

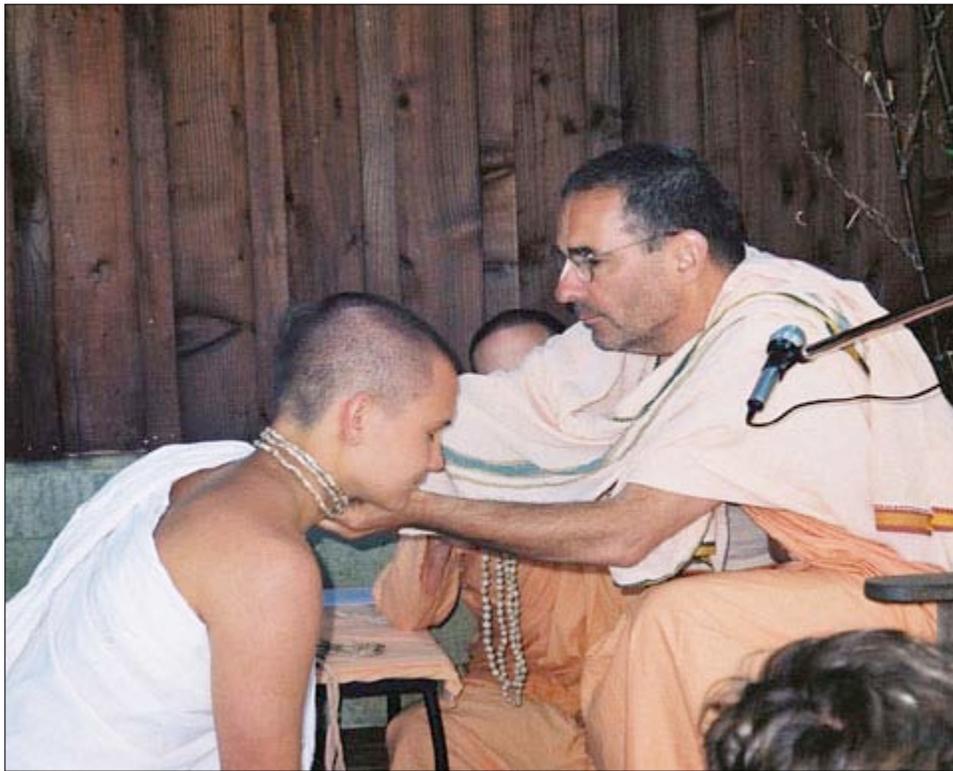
Socio-religious life involves coloring the human drama with a Godly brush, whereas spiritual life involves transcending the human drama altogether and entering God's play. Modern readers of the ever-contemporary *Bhagavad-gita* want to learn about the spirituality of yoga, and they find that the battle of life is won when the material ego is slain. It may be a warrior's duty to fight for a righteous cause, but all such causes pale in consideration of the plight of the soul itself. From chapter 1 through chapter 18, it is this plight that the *Bhagavad-gita* is concerned with, that and the soul's highest prospect.

Indeed, although Krsna appears at a glance to seek Arjuna's allegiance on religious terms, in his concluding remarks he tells him to completely abandon religious concerns<sup>17</sup> and stand firm on the stage of God's play, poised to enter this drama of devotion. Self-surrender in devotion and, more, self-forgetfulness in love constitute the



stage on which the drama of God’s play is performed, a drama and *dharma* that leaves no room for exploitation or violence--not even its religious expressions.

After 18 chapters of discussion, Arjuna finally understands what Krsna’s sermon is about. Thus Arjuna surrenders to Krsna’s will after understanding the reality of his soul as a mere witness to the human drama and of its highest prospect in God’s play. He fights without attachment, surrendered, out of love for God in a plane where action is inaction in that it is not karmically binding, where apparent violence is nonviolence.



Fully developed in yoga, having slain his material ego and thus free from the web of karmic law, and now under the influence of Krsna’s primary potency, Arjuna fights the battle of Kuruksetra. As we learn in the beginning of the *Gita*, the battlefield of Kuruksetra is *dharmaksetra*.<sup>18</sup> It is a righteous place made sacred by nothing less than Krsna’s meeting Goddess Radha here fifty years earlier. It was here, deep within the play of God, that Krsna admitted that he was conquered by Radha’s love.<sup>19</sup> Here Krsna becomes the chariot driver of Arjuna.<sup>20</sup> Within the play of God and devotee at sacred



Kuruksetra, where the devotee becomes the deity of God, what appears to be violence is nonviolence.

What is true nonviolence? When a person understands himself to be only a witness to the human drama, he ceases to act in relation to it and is thus not bound by karmic implications. Furthermore, his enlightened, detached action has a liberating effect on others. Removed from the drama itself, and ceasing to generate a role in it for himself, having extinguished material desire, the soul is at last peaceful and truly nonviolent. He has taken himself out of the hectic life-threatening virtual karmic reality and attained lasting peace. No time, it would seem, for war. Yet it is war, the Battle of Kuruksetra, that in spite of Arjuna's yogic evolution and understanding Krsna asks him to fight in. What kind of war is this then? It is not a war of ordinary religious *dharma*, although all that is religious is included within its scope. It is a war of *prema-dharma*, the *dharma* of love that constitutes the play of God.

God's play is not action that is born out of any necessity. It may be good to conclude that once satisfied one has no reason to move. Desire--need--causes one to move and generate a false identity in the human drama. Free from the bondage of desire, why should one move? Peace holds more for us than all the movement of the world. While the *Gita* reasons like this in no uncertain terms, the Song of God offers still better reasoning as well. Krsna tells Arjuna that if one is truly satisfied and full in oneself, another type of movement is mandated, that of celebration in divine service. Such is the movement within the play of God. A celebration of his fullness, God's play overflows into human society.

By nature's law--the influence of God's secondary potency--all will die only to be born again,<sup>21</sup> but when God's play comes within the human drama, any death that occurs is under the jurisdiction of God's primary potency. Death in God's play is liberating. Those under the influence of God's secondary potency who come in contact with his play are liberated. They attain freedom from the virtual karmic reality without having to undergo the arduous battle of yoga.<sup>22</sup> They rest in the eternal peace of *mukti*, whereas those like Arjuna who consciously participate in God's play attain the full fruit of yoga in eternal celebration. What then was the bloodshed of the Battle of Kuruksetra?

The contrast found in the *Gita* between the thought of killing millions of people--including one's own relatives--and the pure state of consciousness Krsna wants Arjuna to attain must be noted and underscored. This contrast is there to teach us just how pure the devotee of Krsna is and just how high God's play is. Throughout the *Gita*, Krsna teaches Arjuna what it means to be free from false ego, unidentified with the movements of one's body, renounced, selfless, and so on. This is no small accomplishment, and this state of



consciousness cannot be imitated. As much as Arjuna is woeful at the prospect of war, he is awestruck by what Krsna is teaching him to be.

Arjuna's participation in the holy war of Kuruksetra requires his being holy in the highest sense--free from all bias, and most of all religious bias. The possibility of abusing this teaching of the *Gita* leading to antinomianism and an unrighteous so-called religious war is checked considerably by the standard of consciousness described at length and mandated in the text. The person who is "not culpable even when slaying many people" and "who does not actually slay" is "free from all egotism and pure in intellect."<sup>23</sup> He has attained a God-like status and has no need to struggle, no need to fight.

Careful study reveals that it is practically unimaginable that one could attain this state, but the good news of the *Gita* is that it is indeed possible to be such a person--a devotee--and that this is the perfection of life. It involves a state of consciousness in which, for the sake of emphasis, even violence is nonviolence. As unimaginable as this exalted state is, so to is the Battle of Kuruksetra.

It is said that 640 million warriors died<sup>24</sup> in the 18-day battle on a tract of land 80 miles in circumference.<sup>25</sup> And what were the weapons of the war? Bows and arrows empowered by mantras that produced extremely sophisticated nuclear-like weapons of mass destruction.<sup>26</sup>

This constitutes the largest human carnage in the history of the world, in which eight times more people died than the number of civilians and soldiers lost in all of the wars of the modern world combined.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the weaponry of the war is said to have been superior to anything known to humanity at this time, yet we have no war memorials to remind us of the tragedy, no burial grounds, no weapons to replicate, nothing whatsoever to remember or document the war by but the immortal *Bhagavad-gita* itself. Did it really occur?

Yes and no. The battle is not a historical event that can be documented with modern methodology, nor is it something that could have taken place within the realm of human possibility. Yet if the war is merely a myth, then either there is no play of God within the human drama or the *Bhagavad-gita* and the Battle of Kuruksetra are not part of God's play. According to the *Gita*, neither of these two are an option. Thus we are left with the conclusion that the battle did and did not occur. Its violence is nonviolence.

The history of this war is the inconceivable history of the larger circle of God's play coming with the smaller circle of the human drama. How can it be documented? Through the practice of *bhakti-yoga*, the yoga of love. In the consciousness of pure love for God, mature devotees hear Krsna's conch heralding victory for the *dharma* of love as he enacts the drama of the *Bhagavad-gita* and commands Arjuna to take part in the yogic



battle of Kuruksetra--an event infinitely more real to realized devotees than the illusory, mythic drama of humanity's misidentification with matter. It opens for them the door to a realm of possibility that cannot be found within the confines of matter. In the homeland of the soul nothing is impossible. It is here that Krsna's play, with all of its theological and philosophical ramifications, is eternally performed.

The play of Krsna is as human as it is divine. In the drama of Krsna's play, many things occur under the influence of his magical primary potency that do not quite fit into material calculation. Just as in drama things happen that do not happen in the "real world," things happen in Krsna's play that do not tally with our sense of possibilities. The play of Krsna is carefree, which at the same time is wonderfully filled with knowledge, lessons by which humanity can realize its own potential for love.

Krsna plays, and through this play he teaches and attracts us. Arjuna is encouraged by the most loving God to be instrumental in the killing of 640 million people, and if that is not bad enough, some of them were his own relatives. Why didn't Krsna stop the war and convert Duryodhana by other means? Certainly he had the power to do so. The reason is that this was his play, his personal drama in which no one is really killed, and through it he teaches everything we need to know to be absolutely nonviolent.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Bg. 4.18 for a verse that speaks directly about action in inaction and inaction in action. Also see Bg. 5.7. Otherwise, this is a recurring theme throughout the *Gita*. Arjuna's reluctance to act is a form of passive aggression that is karmically implicating. Krsna's idea of fighting does not implicate one in karmic bondage. It is ultimately about being in the world but not of it, as is Krsna's position.

<sup>2</sup> Bg. 4.4

<sup>3</sup> Bg. 4.5-6

<sup>4</sup> Here I am explaining the *Gita* through the lens of Gaudiya Vedanta. Jiva Goswami calls it *acintya bhedabhed tattva*. God is possessed of inconceivable potency, or *sakti*, that is simultaneously one with and different from him. His inconceivable (*acintya*) *sakti*, by which he does the impossible, is referred to in Bg. 9.5 (*yogam aisvaryam*). God's primary potency is referred to as his *svarupa sakti* or *antaranga sakti* (internal/primary/spiritual potency).

<sup>5</sup> This potency is referred to as God's *maya sakti* or *bahir-anga sakti* (external/secondary/material).

<sup>6</sup> Bg. 4.6 speaks of God's primary potency governing his personal activities. See Bg. 9.13 (*daivim prakrtim*) for an example of this potency governing the activities of God's devotees.

<sup>7</sup> Bg. 2.70-71

<sup>8</sup> *Kama*, or desire, is called very injurious/sinful (*maha papma*) in Bg. 3.37.



<sup>9</sup> Bg. 3.27

<sup>10</sup> Bg. 1.24-25

<sup>11</sup> Bg. 1.27-44

<sup>12</sup> Bg. 1.45

<sup>13</sup> Bg. 16.2

<sup>14</sup> Bg. 2.31-38

<sup>15</sup> Bg. 2.38 concludes this section and in it Krsna uses the words same *krtva* (equanimity in action) that define the yogic state. Indeed, the same word (*samah*) is used in Bg. 2.48 to define yoga, and this verse is in fact an explanation of Bg. 2.38 and the entire section of verses under discussion.

<sup>16</sup> We find such verses in chapter 3, which is about *karma yoga*. Those verses found in chapter 18 (18.46-48) are part of an overall summary of the entire text that takes us from dutiful socio-religious life to self-forgetfulness in love of God.

<sup>17</sup> Bg. 18.66

<sup>18</sup> Bg. 1.1

<sup>19</sup> See *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 10.82.44.

<sup>20</sup> The essence of the *Gita* is found in the idea that at the zenith of spiritual attainment the devotee conquers God through love, and thus love itself is supreme. This is evidenced in the *Gita* by the fact that the supreme Godhead Krsna becomes the chariot driver of his devotee Arjuna. In the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* he is defeated by Radha's love.

<sup>21</sup> Bg. 2.27

<sup>22</sup> According to Jiva Goswami's *Krsna-sandarbha*, this is relative only to Krsna's play and not to that of any of his *avatars*.

<sup>23</sup> Bg. 18.17

<sup>24</sup> See Sanga, *Kuruksetra War: 'myth, history or lila'*

<sup>25</sup> Kuruksetra of today, with all of its important holy places relevant to the battle, is considered to be an area 80 miles in circumference, although the *Satapatha Brahmana* 11.5.1.4 seems to indicate that it may have been larger in ancient times.

<sup>26</sup> Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada identifies the *brahmastra* as a nuclear weapon in his *Srimad-Bhagavatam* translation and commentary on 1.7.19.

<sup>27</sup> This calculation includes the Civil War, Boer War, Mozambiquean War, Russian Revolution, Korean War, Vietnam War, World War I, and World War II. See Hutchinson Encyclopedia (1996) and Macmillan Encyclopedia (1981).



### The Bhagavad-Gita: Its Feeling and Philosophy

Swami B.V. Tripurari

(Mandala Publishing Group, 2001, 615pp, \$19.95)

Western academia seems to be in perpetual pursuit of the “definitive” edition. In this light, one immediately asks why another English language translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*? Swami Tripurari deals with this even before he begins his introduction. The East, unlike the West, has a tradition of generational commentaries on the great scriptures.

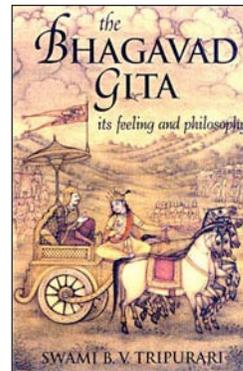
Tripurari tells a touching story of a walk with his guru A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, where the guru encouraged his disciples to write their own books. One of the others present commented that Prabhupada’s books were sufficient. Prabhupada responded that it was the fruit of the seeds the guru plants in the disciple to write and distribute one’s own books.

Some of Prabhupada’s other disciples have accused Tripurari of overstepping his guru by publishing his own translation. They argue that *Bhagavad Gita As It Is* should be sufficient. This charge ignores the long tradition of Gaudiya Vedanta commentaries on the *Gita* and the advice of their own guru to continue the tradition.

Swami Tripurari provides a verse-by-verse translation and commentary of the *Gita*. His purports are approachable, though with rigorous citations to preceding Vaishnava literature, and emphasize the emotional import of the interaction between Krishna and Arjuna.

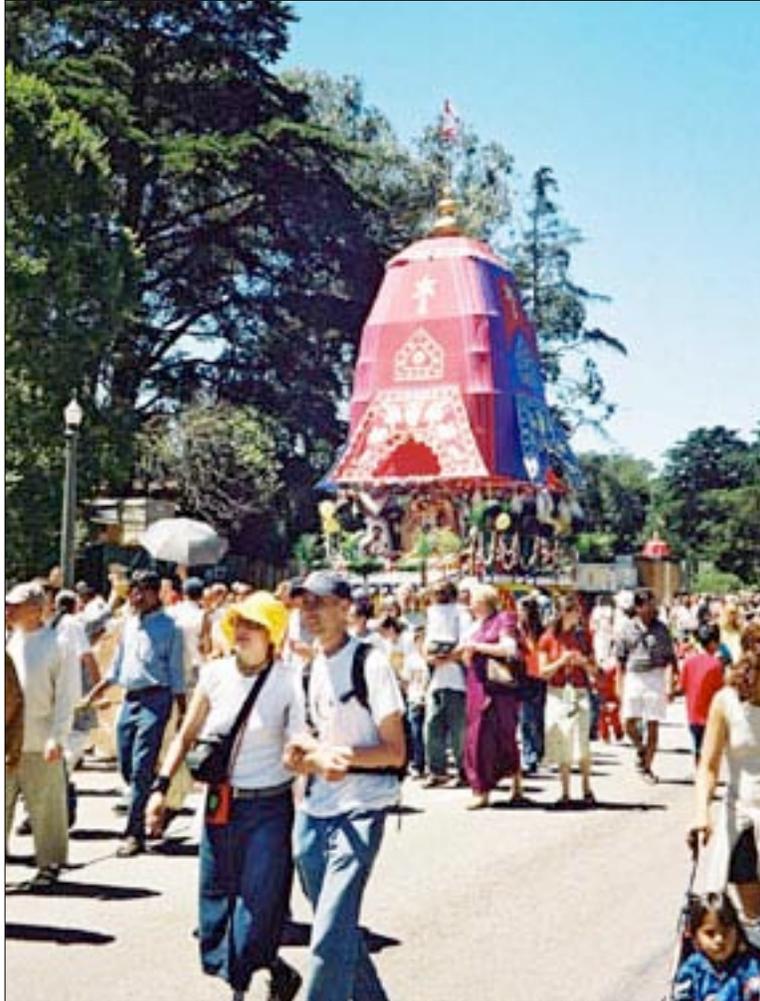
One of the problems of a verse-by-verse translation and commentary is the breaking in flow caused by the pages of purports inserted by each line. Tripurari manages to avoid this pitfall by tying each purport not just to the verse being commented upon but also to the full flow of the story unfolding.

This is certainly not a replacement to Shri Prabhupada’s groundbreaking English translation of the *Gita*. I very much doubt it was meant to be. It is however a very powerful addition to the English Vaishnava canon that succeeds in opening up the *Gita* in ways that Prabhupada’s did not.



**Ratha Yatra San Francisco 2003**

*Rama Kesava dasa*





२५

**Cleansing the heart began with cleansing the temple**

*Pitambarada*

Reading about the myriad ways Sri Krsna brings different souls to His service motivated me to share my experiences of discovering Krsna consciousness. I hope you will find it interesting.

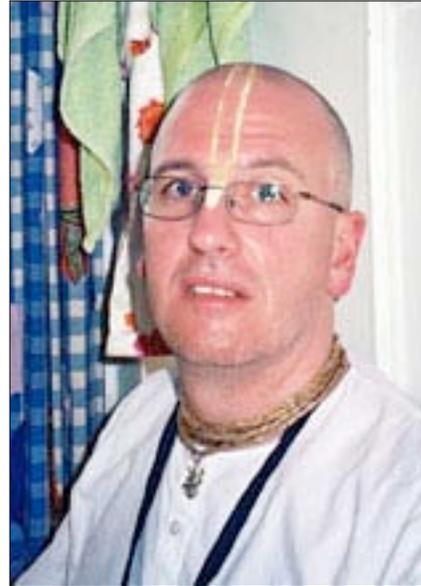
I dropped out of university in May 1985, and moved to London to be with my boyfriend. After two short, intense months, he dumped me to go back to his “ex”. I moved in with some other students I had met previously and we squatted in Brixton with a couple of drug dealers.

I became involved with the anti-Apartheid movement, and was part of the Non-Stop Picket of South Africa House in Trafalgar Square to seek the release from prison of Nelson Mandela. I was arrested on numerous occasions over three and a half months, and still carry scars inflicted by police.

On a Sunday afternoon that August, my 19th birthday, a friend took me to a place where lunch was free and nutritious. We walked up from Trafalgar Square, through Leicester Square and along Greek Street to Soho Square. The sun was shining, and the streets of Soho were crammed with “alternative” types -- punks, hippies, drag queens and leathermen.

Across the square lay an insignificant street leading to one of the world’s busiest thoroughfares -- Oxford Street. Strange to think just how important that little street was to become in my life! On the left-hand side of the street was a restaurant with the exotic name “Govinda’s,” but it was to the next door that my friend took me.

A smell of incense and the sound of singing, drumming and clapping drifted downstairs. Devotees in saris and orange-dyed dhotis stood outside and in the entranceway. They were all polite and friendly, but to me they looked weird -- mud on



their heads, shaven with silly little ponytails. Little did I know that within the week I would be one of them.

I was a little embarrassed to take my shoes off as my socks had holes but, seeing others had bare feet, I joined them. We walked into the temple room, and the noise, smells and sights overwhelmed me.

My friend bowed down to a murti of Srila Prabhupada dressed in orange clothes, and then to a picture of a western man dressed the same. He then took me before the altar and bowed again before the Deities of Jagannatha Deva, Balarama Deva and Subhadra Devi, to whom I lost my heart immediately, strange and nonhuman though they seemed at first.

Finally he bowed to murtis of a young Radha and Krsna -- otherwise known as Sri Sri Radha-Londonisvara—all dressed in glittering clothing with rhinestones. Leading me to one side, he introduced me to a friend of his, a young man named Valmiki das. I was in a daze; it was almost too much to take in, yet strangely comfortable and homelike. We sat down and listened to the music and accompanying chanting.

“Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare; Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.”

Before long I was singing along with gusto; I felt so alive. Almost too soon it was over. A conch sounded and the curtains closed. Everyone bowed to the floor and took part in a responsive prayer. I followed suit and thanked God for bringing me there.

After we sat up, we sat in rows, and people began distributing paper plates and cups. Then came the food. It was hot and steaming, and totally vegetarian, of course. I had not eaten a proper vegetarian meal before this, and was very impressed. As we ate, Valmiki prabhu explained all about His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami and how he had brought Krishna consciousness from India in the ‘sixties.

The western-looking guy in the picture I had seen turned out to be Bhagavan das, then a sannyasi-guru; many of his disciples resided in the United Kingdom. After the lunch (where I learned the food was called prasadam and was sacred, having been offered to God), we helped clear up and then it was time for another ceremony, which I learnt was called arati.

The conch, which I had first taken to be a horn of sorts, blew again and the curtains opened. I watched entranced as a woman devotee offered incense, lighted ghee wicks, flowers, a shell filled with water, a handkerchief, a peacock-feather fan, and a yak-tail whisk to the Deities.

So many questions flooded into my mind. Then the ghee-wick lamp was being offered to me! I didn’t know what to do, but Valmiki guided my hand over the flames



briefly and then to my forehead. Next thing I knew, I was splashed with water and a flower was placed in my hand.

I danced and sang with a vigour I never thought possible on a full stomach; joy overwhelmed me and I began to weep. When my friend said it was time to go, as we had a long way home, I agreed, though reluctantly. After our goodbyes, we bowed down again and left the temple room to get our shoes and go home.

All I could talk about on the bus was Krishna. I wanted to know more but, because my friend only went for the free food, he didn't know more than I already had discovered.

I don't know how I got to sleep that night. I had never experienced a "high" like it. I was buzzing; I felt so alive. My eyes, ears and heart had opened to God as never before. I had to find out more!

Next afternoon, I again headed up to Soho Street and the temple, arriving around 5 p.m. I spoke to Sylvia, a woman at the reception desk, who remembered me from the previous day.

As we were talking, Valmiki prabhu came in the door; his face lit up as he, too, recognized me. He invited me up to the temple room, and I went with him. To my surprise, the Deities were wearing different clothes. Valmiki explained about Krishna's being a person; it made immediate sense that a person would like a change of clothes every day.

I asked him about the bag devotees wore around their necks. Valmiki explained the principle of Japa and, asking me to wait in the temple, returned with wooden beads and a cloth bag. He told me the smaller string of beads was to be attached to the bag and used to tally the number of "rounds" you did, and the larger set were for "doing the rounds."

The wood was from Tulasi Devi, a sacred plant, and there were 108 beads on the large set. The Maha-Mantra should be chanted on each bead in turn, and 108 times was one round. As an initiated devotee, Valmiki das had to chant at least 16 rounds daily. He proceeded to show me how to hold the beads, and listened whilst I chanted.

We had to cut short our conversation, as a class was about to begin, so I listened to the talk on the Bhagavad-gita. To this day, I still remember the verse under discussion: "Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reactions. Do not fear." (Bg. 18.66)

It was as if Sri Krishna was speaking directly to me, and me alone. The answer I had been seeking presented itself unambiguously: "Just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you; do not fear."



I stayed until Sayana-arati that evening, and chanted on my new beads as I walked the five miles home.

The next day, I slept in, still tired from the long walk home. I returned to the temple just before noon and again spoke with Sylvia prabhu and Valmiki prabhu. They explained the four regulative principles to me: No meat, fish, or eggs, no gambling, no intoxication, and no illicit sex.

This all made sense to me. I felt as if I was being reminded of what I already knew. Valmiki introduced me to Ranchor das, the temple president, and I expressed a desire to join ISKCON; Ranchor prabhu seemed pleased. I stayed until the Deities were put to bed, and took the bus home.

Wednesday I rose early and got to the temple at around 7 a.m., experiencing the Deity greeting, Guru-puja, *Srimad Bhagavatam* class and breakfast with my new friends. I felt so complete.

After breakfast, all the devotees disappeared about their duties and, apart from the Deities, I was alone in the temple room. Seeing flower petals from the Guru-puja and debris from breakfast scattered everywhere, my first thought was, "This is Krishna's house. He will be receiving visitors soon. They mustn't see the temple room in this state."

From previous days, I remembered where the dustpan, broom, mop and bucket were kept, and proceeded to get them out. After sweeping the floor, I went upstairs to get water, but the only place I knew was in the lavatory room. As I got there, Lilashakti dasi (head pujari and Ranchor's wife) asked what I was doing. She explained that I should use water from the Pujari department tap, as it was "clean."

She then asked why I was washing the Temple room floor, as it was someone else's service. I explained that no one else had yet begun and I knew it needed doing before guests arrived. At this moment, I believe my true nature was beginning to manifest: I am pujari in my heart. Lilashakti prabhu gave me water and eucalyptus essential oil to put in it. This was the beginning of my service to Sri Sri Radha-Londonisvara, which still continues 18 years later.

Next morning, I rose at 2 a.m. to be at the Temple in time for Mangala-arati at 4:30 a.m. I stayed for the morning programme again, and again I tidied the Temple room -- not that I minded.

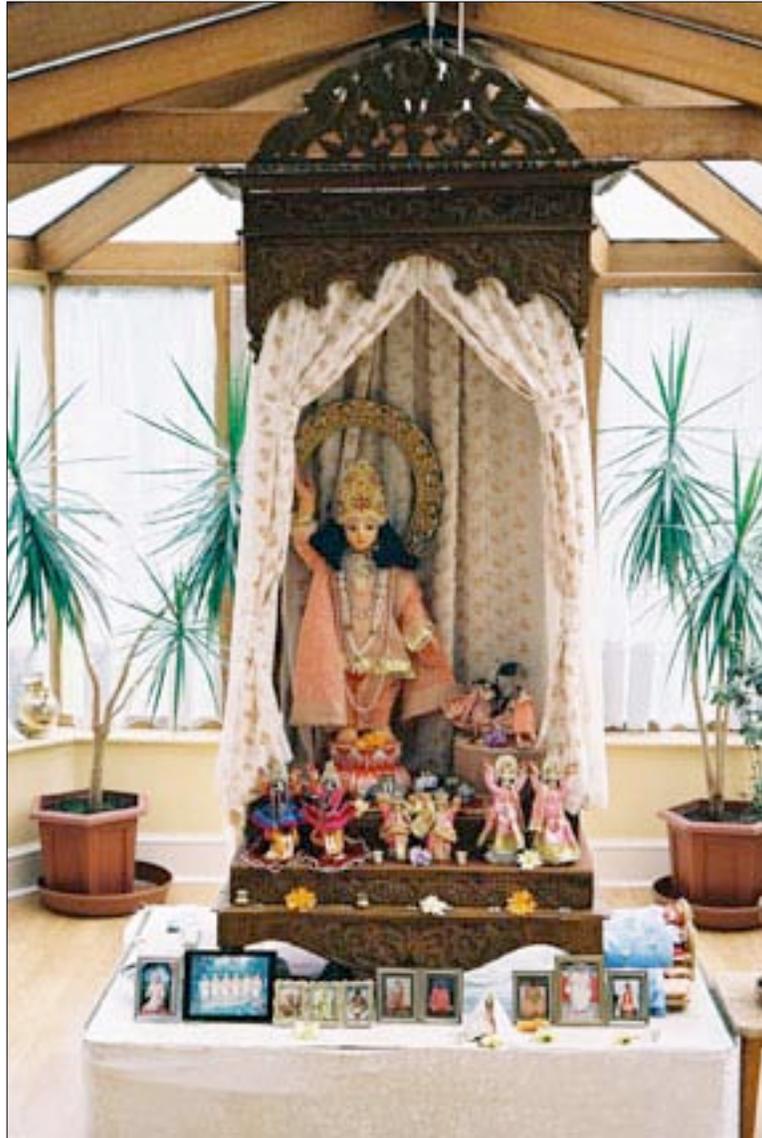
That afternoon, I was washing the stairs as Ranchor came in, and I plucked up the courage to ask if I could join the temple and move in. To my delight, he said yes. I asked him if that day would be too soon; he said if I desired that, it was okay. I finished the stairs, and rushed home.



It took me only minutes to pack my belongings into a suitcase and, as I almost fell downstairs with it, one of my housemates came in -- one of the drug dealers. I explained what I was doing, and he gave me a kiss and wished me luck. He asked how I planned to get to the Temple, as I could hardly get my case down stairs. He gave me £50, helped me out to the street and hailed a London Black Cab for me. I got in the taxicab and “left behind the material world” -- or so I thought.

At the temple, Sylvia prabhu gave me a strange look, but when I explained that Ranchor prabhu had given his permission, she gave me a great big hug and immediately called for Valmiki prabhu on the intercom. He came downstairs and, learning I was moving in, became ecstatic. After squeezing me nearly to death in a bear hug, he helped me upstairs to the dormitory. That day I was “shaved up,” and learned to put on a dhoti and tilaka. So began my odyssey in Krishna consciousness.





Rama Kesava dasa



**For the Love of God:  
Variations of the Vaisnava School of Krishna Devotion**

*Phil Hine*

Western pagans seeking for queer-positive themes & representations in Indian mysticism have tended to focus on popularized notions of Tantra, possibly due to Tantra's supposed emphasis on 'sacred sexuality.'

In this essay, I will outline some of the odder ideas & practices that are associated with the Vaisnava tradition –focusing on those lineages where there is – to a western, queer eye at least – some element of gender-liminality going on.

The Classical *bhakti* (devotional) Vaisnava tradition grew up around the medieval Bengali saint Caitanya (1486-1553) and his followers. Classical (orthodox) Vaisnava was drawn from Classical Vedic literature such as the *Bhagavata Gita*, the *Bhagavata Purana* and the Bengali *Gita Govinda*.

For orthodox Vaisnavas, Krishna is the primordial god and creator of the Universe. Krishna resides in a heavenly pastoral abode, sometimes known as the *Golaka* (Cow-land) to which all human souls yearn to return. In this idyllic realm, Krishna frolics with the *Gopis* – the beautiful young cowgirls whom he has enticed away from their husbands. Krishna was also accompanied by 'cow-boys', (*Gopas*) and although they do feature in various of the popular Krishna myths, their appreciation of Krishna's beauty was said to be 'chaste' (at least by the orthodox Vaisnavas). It is said that the Gopas experienced 'madness' caused by their grief of being separated from Krishna, just as Radha and the Gopis did. This is the 'divine love' (*premas*) as opposed to human passion (*raga*). I have seen occasional references to some Gopas described as *priya-nama-sakas* – 'effeminate' cowherd boys who assisted Krishna in his affairs with the Gopis.

A surviving celebration of Radha & Krishna's dalliances is the *gotipua* – a tradition (thought to have started in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century) of cross-dressing boy temple dancers (although they are said to only dance within the temple on particular occasions) who enact the Radha-Krishna oriented poems such as the *Gita Govinda*, and who in turn, have influenced the development of modern Orrisan Dance. A troupe of Gotipua acrobatic dancers visited Edinburgh in 2002, but the tradition is said to be waning in contemporary India. As a dance form, Gotipua employs not only acrobatic feats, but also highly formalised steps and mudras; each Gotipua troupe is led by a guru who teaches the form. According to some sources, Gotipua emerged as a reaction to the Mughal invasion of Orissa, which suppressed the existing tradition of female temple-dancers, and led to the tradition being continued by cross-dressed boys.



Much of Classical Vaisnava practice is concerned not only with singing and dancing the praises of Krishna, but also the belief that by identifying with the inhabitants of Krishna's heaven, devotees are able to return to an eternal loving relationship with Krishna, the supreme god. However, unlike Tantric traditions where devotees would identify with the god or goddess (or both), Vaisnava devotees only identified with Krishna's companions, and not the god himself. Devotees who identified with the Gopis and in particular, the female attendants of Krishna's consort, Radha, were thought to experience the most intense divine love, as they visualised the divine couple's erotic *lila* (play) in the heavenly world. This reflects a Hindu view that the relationship between the ideal devotee and deity is identical to that of the ideal woman. So, in order to become devotees, men must renounce their masculinity.

This should not be interpreted (as is often done by Western pagans seeking expressions of male-female complementary status in Indian religious practices) as giving prominence to women. If anything, this bhakti supports and reinforces the dominant gender hierarchy – so that 'service' becomes not only a matter of duty, but also the *only* source of authentic fulfillment, particularly for women. So a woman's dutiful love for her husband is reframed as the highest kind of devotion. Whilst there are numerous examples of males becoming female in Hindu mythology, there are far fewer instances of women becoming men, and these are usually portrayed negatively (see Wendy Doniger, 1980). Moreover, it was very difficult (and remains so) for women to become *bhaktas* (female devotees). One of the most famous bhaktas is Mira Bai, a 16<sup>th</sup> century female saint. Accounts of her life mention that her family (she came from the Rajasthani ruling class) disapproved strongly of her devotion to Krishna, reportedly locking her in her room and even attempting to kill her. Whilst the songs and poems of Mira Bai are still popular in modern India, and she is revered as a saint, her renunciate lifestyle, though admired, is still not held up as a model for women to emulate. Religious devotion, it seems, was a legitimate (though extreme) 'alternative' to marriage and family life for women.

In Classical Vaisnava doctrine, the erotic loveplay of Krishna was largely interpreted in allegorical terms. Although Krishna himself engages in numerous adulterous affairs, this was interpreted as an allegory for god playing with his creation. Human beings should not therefore, seek to mimic Krishna's passions, and should observe the rules of caste and family values. This viewpoint is still echoed by contemporary Krishna devotional movements such as *The International Society for Krishna Consciousness* (ISKCON):

"Krishna says in the Bhagavad-gita that He is sex according to religious principles. So that sex, within marriage for having a nice Krishna conscious child, is very



good. But otherwise sex, be it homosexual or heterosexual is simply meant for the pleasure of the senses of the people involved. It is not being done for the service and pleasure of Krishna. So it is not allowed in Krishna consciousness.

In Krishna consciousness sex is for having nice God conscious children and such sex is Krishna Himself and is very glorious. But other sex is illicit sex and it is prohibited for a devotee. At the time of initiation a devotee has to accept vows including “no illicit sex” which that means no sex except within marriage for having children. It seems to some to be an almost impossible task as we are so attached to sex and think it is so important... But a devotee experiences a higher taste, a greater pleasure. A devotee fully engaged in Krishna consciousness under the direction of a bona fide pure devotee spiritual master is constantly enjoying a greater pleasure than sex from serving Krishna. So for him sex is not a very important thing at all.”

“... So having sex is not at all satisfying, one simply wants more and more sex and even if he gets it he is still not satisfied and the results are actually very bad. There are so many diseases and a man loses his energy, strength and determination if he loses too much semen.”

Madhudvisa dasa, quoted from [krishna.org/Articles/2001/01/00239.html](http://krishna.org/Articles/2001/01/00239.html).

This rather suppressive view of human sexuality has recently come under scrutiny due to a multi-million dollar lawsuit launched against ISKCON by forty-four former Krishna students who claim that as children, they were abused both physically and sexually, at schools run by the Society, located in both the USA and India. Also, Gay & Lesbian members of ISKCON have founded the *Gay and Lesbian Vaishnava Association*, which advocates the understanding of Gay & Lesbian issues using a “third gender” typology that they argue, is present in the Vedas.

Madhudvisa’s comment regarding men losing ‘energy’ through sex (particularly through the loss of semen) is itself worthy of exploration. The Indian belief that loss of semen through sex dates back to the time of the *Upanishads*, and still retains its power today. Gananath Obeyesekere has coined the term “cultural disease” in referring to the Indic concern with semen retention – which is often synonymous with the maintenance of good health, life expectancy, and the production of sons. Male ‘virility’ therefore requires that semen be conserved.

According to Ayurvedic theory, semen is accumulated slowly, as a by-product of digestion, and males have only a limited supply. A popular belief (again stemming from the Ayurvedic texts) is that one drop of semen is equal to one hundred drops of blood. It is said to take 28 days (i.e. a lunar month) for the food ingested by males to become semen.



Coupled with these beliefs regarding male seed is the belief that sexual intercourse is actually potentially dangerous to men, as a woman who is older, younger, or more powerful than a man, can potentially ‘drain’ him of his vital essence (i.e. his *Sakti*, which resides in male semen). In the popular imagination, women appear to have a potential vampiric quality – their mere presence, even as male imaginative images, may be enough to drain a man’s vitality. Hence celibacy is equated with health and longevity, not just for ascetic yogins (which tends to be the Western expectation), but as a general cultural imperative. Loss of semen through *any* type of sexual activity (including masturbation and nocturnal emissions) is considered harmful, both spiritually and physically, and thus are sources of anxiety.

## Tantric Vaisnava Variations

### The Sahajiya

The Vaisnava Sahajiyas flourished in Bengal, Assam and Orissa between the 16<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. For these Tantrics, Krishna was not a supreme being, uninvolved and distant, but the inner divine aspect of man, whilst his consort, Radha, was understood to be the inner divine aspect of woman. However, the Sahajiyas were not content with merely visualizing the love-play of Krishna and his consort in heaven, but espoused the view that men and women should make love in order to attain the condition of *Sahaja* – a term usually translated as ‘spontaneous’ or ‘primordial’. Sahajiya practices (*sadhanas*) were devised in order to help devotees attain the *sahaja* state of liberation. These *sadhanas* – much to the horror of orthodox Vaisnavas – included ritual sexual intercourse and pursuing adulterous relationships. According to Glen A. Hayes, there were three stages of Sahajiya practice. Beginners (*pravata*) used the standard Bengali Vaisnava devotions – singing, dancing, and chanting praises to Krishna, accompanied by the practice of divinizing the body and identity as one of Krishna’s followers. The second and third stages (*sadhaka* – accomplished and *siddha* – perfected) related to the use of the more obviously tantrically-inspired erotic practices. According to the Sahajiya tradition, this required a guru who should, ideally, be a woman. The Sahajiyas believed that all women were teachers, and that men should learn from them. Further, drawing on the many dalliances of Krishna for inspiration, for the Sahajiyas, the ideal female partner for the male devotee was a woman denoted as *parakiya* – belonging to another. Such risky, forbidden liaisons were said to heighten the passions of love.



The Sahajiyas developed an extensive sexual alchemy around bodily fluids, and also had a unique model of the subtle body that differed markedly from most Saivite and Sakta Tantric sects. The latter is described at length in Hayes' essay.

### The Sakhibhava

I first came across references to the Sakhibhava cult in an article by James M. Martin entitled "I'd Radha be Krishna: Some Thoughts on the Sakhibhava sect of India." Martin quotes a passage from Hasting's *Encyclopedia of Religion and Morals*:

"The Sakhibhavas are a branch of the Radhavallabhis (q.v.), small in number and of little importance. They carry to extremes the worship of Radha, Krishna's mistress, whom they look upon as his shakti, or energetic power. The men assume the character of Radha's sakhis, or girl friends, and, to enforce the idea of the change of sex, assume female garb, with all women's manners and customs, even pretending to be subject to the catamenia. Their aim is to be accepted as genuine sakhis in a future life, and thus to enjoy a share of Krishna's favors. They are of ill repute, and do not show themselves much in public. According to [H. H.] Wilson, they are to be found in Jaipur and Benares and also in Bengal. Some of them are wandering mendicants. They appear to have been numerous in the 17<sup>th</sup> century."

Martin observes that the above passage acts to marginalize and downplay the significance of the Sakhibhava due to their 'transgressive' sexuality.

Vern L. Bullough notes that the Sakhibhava held that only Krishna was truly male, and that every other creature was, essentially female, subject to the pleasure-play of Krishna. According to Bullough, female devotees of the sect offered their 'sexual favours' freely to anyone, believing that all their partners are manifestations of Krishna. Male devotees affected the dress, behavior and mannerisms of women, including an imitation of menstruation (during which time they withdrew from worship) and took the 'female' part in sexual intercourse, offering it as an act of devotion. Bullough does identify male Sakhibhava with the term, Hijra, which slightly confuses the issue.

Just as orthodox Vaisnavas viewed the Tantric Sahajiyas with horror, so too the Sakhibhavas were held up as an example of 'degenerate' behavior, Devdutt Pattanaik, in *The Man Who Was a Woman and other Queer Tales from Hindu Lore* notes that the Sakhibhavas were more likely to be viewed as objects of derision and amusement rather than honored for their devotion:

"When a male ascetic of the esoteric Sakhi-bhava order dresses up as a woman in order to be closer to the supreme divine principle who is perceived as the male god Krishna, he often ends becoming the object of amusement and ridicule rather than awe



and appreciation. The average Vaishnava family, while fervently worshipping Krishna ... would not empathize with their son's desire to become a Sakhi."

### **The Khartabhaja**

The Khartabhaja appear in Jeffrey J. Kripal's *Kali's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna*. From Kripal's description, the Khartabhaja appear to be another Tantric manifestation of orthodox Vaisnava ideas. The leader of the sect, Vaishnavacharan, taught that "if one can worship God in an image [then] why not in a living man?" For Vaishnavacharan, such worship led to the complete knowledge of God's play in man. The Khartabhaja cult took the form of a community, possibly composed of both men, women, and *Hijras*. According to Kripal, Vaishnavacharan's teachings had some influence on Ramakrishna, and it is from Ramakrishna's teachings that Kripal has pieced together what little is known of Khartabhaja practice. For example, Kripal (quoting Ramakrishna) writes:

"Vaishnavacharan liked to look at pictures of men, for they aroused in him feelings of tenderness (*komala*) and love (*prema*)."

This practice was also used by female Khartabhajas – through loving a chosen man, identified with God, they could attain the divine. Ramakrishna railed against such an idea in his teachings, speaking against the women who take lovers and end up 'scandalously pregnant.'

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## Recollections of Srila Prabhupada in Hawaii, 1976

*Letter from Syamasundara dasa*

Please accept my best wishes, and most humble obeisances. All glories to His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Where would any of us be had He not so mercifully come to the West? What would any Westerner know about Krishna, Vrindavan, the Maha Mantra, or Prasadam? So many things...

I was living on the East coast of the United States in 1976 when I heard that Prabhupada was going to Honolulu. I was ready to “get warm”, and also spend some time with my most merciful Guru. I flew to California to visit the devotees in San Francisco; my old stomping grounds. Jayananda was there, and so many devotees that had helped shape my Spiritual life. Then I flew to Honolulu, and was delighted to see Prabhupada again. I wasn’t planning on staying for long, but I got to sleep just outside His door on the balcony. I could lay down, and tilt my head back, and watch Him working at His desk almost the whole night long. He did so much translating there at that Temple.

One morning I think it was May 1976; Siddhasvarupa dasa came to visit. I have never had good interactions with Him, and I honor Him from a distance. I had met Him in Lahaina, Maui previously, and had always been treated with disrespect from Him. I was pretty “delicate”, and have always had a very long sikha. I used to hear comments from Siddha about it, and the attachment He thought I had about it whenever He saw me. Prabhupada said not to worry. That there were worse things to have attachment for. I heard Him say that on several occasions when someone criticized one of us for the length of our sikhas.

One day Prabhupada was trying to gently persuade Siddha to “get with the program”. Siddha used to actually challenge Prabhupada; that maybe Siddha’s ideas were superior to His Spiritual Master’s plans. It was really immature, and un-believable how He carried on. Anyway one day I was standing by Prabhupada’s window overlooking His private garden; when Siddha came in. He was whining about all of the “pretty boys”, and Homos in ISKCON. Prabhupada just let Him vent, and didn’t say much of anything. After a while Siddha just left. He didn’t get the reaction He had wanted.

Prabhupada sat at His desk for a while.



I was feeling really angry at Siddha, but also self-conscious about my own sexuality.

Prabhupada just sat there quietly, and deep in thought for awhile. He looked over at me briefly and said, “What is the difference if a person is held in this Material World by a gold chain, or a silver chain?”

I said “I don’t know Prabhupada.”

He then said “I am glad that Siddha Swarupa is chanting, and reading my books.

“But He is always focusing on everybody else, and not on the Supreme Person.

“That’s the important thing.”

From the early days in San Francisco I saw so many people come to the Temple, Kirtans, etc... There were many Gay, and Lesbian people. Prabhupada was always aware that these people were among His audience.

He always seemed to not give it a whole lot of notice. I know it probably seemed a bit “strange” to Him at some level, but He didn’t like any of His disciples to make comment about it. I hope this little slice of ISKCON History is interesting to you. I know that Prabhupada knew my sexual identity; but I never, ever felt anything but love; equal in every way with the love He displayed, and felt for any other person so fortunate to come to Krishna Consciousness in this lifetime. That’s the real thing, isn’t it?

Your friend, supporter, and servant.

Syamasundara dasa



**Coming Out to the Devotees at Gita-nagari**  
**An experiment in honesty and openness**

His Holiness Bhakti Tirtha Swami gave the following lecture on May 15, 2003, at the Gita-nagari farm community in Pennsylvania. Maharaja is seated on a saffron-colored chair in the temple room. He is surrounded by greenery and Sri Sri Radha-Damodara are to his left. He is wearing a white and lavender garland, and behind him is an open window from which the occasional cries of the temple peacocks can be heard. After leading a kirtana and reciting some prayers, Maharaja begins the lecture.

Sri Sri Radha-Damodaraji ki jaya!

So, I mentioned this morning that I would change my topic and I would talk today about sexuality. I think you know we talk about marriage, we talk sometimes about relationships and we talk and discuss things about community. As a matter of fact we are looking closer and closer at the model that we have with ISKCON, moving from a monastic order to, basically, a congregational scheme. So there are many things to scrutinize to see how best we can please and serve Srila Prabhupada, the main way is to look at our personal lives, as individuals, up to this time in our Krsna consciousness, the many ways we want to try to look at how we can be better devotees. And so one of the ways that we become better devotees is we look at how we can offer ourselves better in Krsna's service. One way we can offer ourselves better in Krsna's service is that we try to communicate to each other as best as possible—this is the nature of healthy sadhu-sanga. We want to always try to access what is the siddhanta, the goal that we're trying to attain, what constitutes being a proper sadhika, one who is following the sadhana practices, and in the community environment we try to revisit the individual as well as the institution, both in the present and in the legacy of antiquity.

Sometime back I gave a very, I would say, interesting class in addressing the ideas of "tritiya-prakriti" or third gender, and trying to look at this in terms of what's been given to us in our shastra, and also reflecting on ways of how we look at this at the present time. One member of our community wanted to share something, and I wanted to take advantage of addressing some issues in relationship to this person's sharing, just kind of revisiting some things we've discussed, and because especially in the last few



months, actually, in the last year or two, there's a lot of discussion taking place in the Vaishnava community on this issue. It has interesting dynamics. Like everything, it can be viewed in different ways. It can be addressed out of context or it can be categorized based on some of our previous experiences and understandings. We are who we are. We are all products of heredity and socialization from this life and many other lifetimes, and we often look at that to understand what we are trying to become. So Mohini wanted to share something, and then I'll move on with the class, sort of give the class in connection with some things she wanted to share with the community. Is that all right Mohini? Since she asked me to speak to the community I thought this would be a good time, and then we'll spend a few minutes discussing what she wants to offer to us.

(At this point Mohini-murti dasi, wearing a red and saffron sari, goes up to the microphone and pays her obeisances. She then begins to speak, rather meekly at first.)  
 Mohini: I don't know what to say right now, so I'm just going to speak from my heart because I don't have anything written down. First of all, I want to thank the devotees that I've talked to and have been counseling me through this. I want to first of all thank His Holiness Bhakti Tirtha Swami, Mother Devavati, Mother Purana, Ajamila, Pariksit, Anasuya, Mother Laksmi and a few others, and yes, my spiritual master especially (for helping me) through this whole process of becoming more vulnerable and truthful to the devotees about being a third-gender devotee within this community. This is a rather humbling and very difficult process for me to go through, to come to terms with being myself within this community, within following the four regulative principles and being engaged in service. So, I would like to try to just set the best example as possible, as a third-gender devotee in this community and help, so that way I can become more Krsna conscious so I can also help others. Not to be stuck in a pigeonhole and be invisible, but be visible. So many of us have been stuck in a pigeonhole and died silently, because of fear of scrutinization, bigotry, homophobia and different sources of mental or physical, sometimes in the past, abuse or being thrown out because someone doesn't really understand. Also in the past some third-gender people have come out in a very un-Vaishnava way, but I personally want to come out and be honest to the devotees. Bhakti Tirtha Maharaja and Mother Devavati have been counseling me; they will know my every move and my every endeavor in this process. So there is nothing that will be unknown to the community either, because I want to be fully honest, and vulnerable, and try to perform devotional service as best I can, by the mercy of guru and Krsna and all the devotees here. Thank you.



Bhakti Tirtha Maharaja: Jaya! Vaishnava Thakura ki jaya! So, I want to piggyback on this and use this as a topic today, just briefly, and then open up for discussion. In previous classes I shared how often we lump everyone who is in the gay community into a certain sector. We discussed how, when Lord Caitanya was born, if we read the section closely we see how Jagannatha Misra invited so many people to come and some of those who came to honor Lord Caitanya's birth were called the "natabaris." These natabaris, they were men, gay men, who were professional actors, performers, dancers, and it was considered that their presence was auspicious. Prabhupada, in one or two conversations, one major conversation, where he was discussing this issue, and he says how in India there were special villages, special places, where such people lived and that also they were invited to various ceremonies—they were celibates, they were invited to various celibate ceremonies—and it was considered that their presence would bring blessings to the environment. There's also the example, of course, we mentioned about Arjuna. We may remember, it was quite a time back, when the Pandavas were exiled, we remember how Arjuna, as well as all of them, were surreptitious—they were in disguise—and Arjuna's particular disguise, the word then was used as a "eunuch," but it was understood that he was a man dressed as a woman, cloth, a woman's, mannerisms... When the Maharaja Virata examined his character, to see if he was going to invite Arjuna into the kingdom, they tested him to see if he was attracted to women, and of course his service was dressing women, and singing, and decorating their hair, etc. His name was, of course, Brihannala. So if this idea of third gender was something in itself demonic, or something in itself evil or whatever, then of course obviously Jagannatha Misra would never have invited such people to Lord Caitanya's appearance, and the Pandavas would have never considered having Arjuna to take that kind of involvement, nor would the king have investigated him to see if he was going to allow him to do this kind of work, or in Vedic times would such people be invited to various types of occasions, to live in certain villages, etc.

Now, we may say, well that's different from what homosexuals are today, or gay people. Yes and no. There are so many classifications of people who are in straight bodies as well as in gay bodies. At the same time we are none of these. In one sense—(Mohini's) sharing—there's many positive things about it, in one sense there's things that some people can use in a negative way, and in another sense, it's a non-issue. First, if it's a non-issue, let's take that one first, because, we've all been men and women in so many different lifetimes, we've had different orientations in many lifetimes, and rarely is anybody just, you see it has to do with hormones and chromosomes also in some cases. In the sense of the basic biological perspective, "na tv evaham jatu nasam, natvam



neme janadhipah”—never was there I time when I did not exist—but in terms of the bodies that we have at particular times, there are some hormonal and chromosomal combinations. And especially in these days, the combinations are not always so distinct. Let me just give you some examples from a biological perspective. Normally what is considered male is XY chromosome, female XX chromosome. We’re looking at this first from a biological perspective, social, and then spiritual. Now from a biological perspective, there are times when there are people who have XY chromosomes, which means that you’re supposed to be a male, for whatever that means, but there are people who have XY chromosomes who would normally be considered to be male, but they have female organs, uterus and vagina, and they have XY chromosomes. Some people have XY chromosomes and they’re born, knowing that they’re male, but they’re born without male genitals, totally. There are people who have what’s called XX chromosomes, female, but they’re born with testes and male genitals, penis. Or there are people who have XX, what’s normally considered female chromosomes, but they’re born with either genital. And there are people of different combinations, and in some cases they’re born with both genitals.

Now, why are we discussing all of this? For several reasons. One, because at any given time it’s supposed that we have about at least five per cent of the people in society who would be considered to be gay. It’s not just recent; it’s been in existence since time immemorial. You look at Arjuna, you look at Lord Brahma... You say, well what about this story in the Bhagavatam where Lord Brahma is engaged in creation, and, in the process of creation, he produces two, what is normally called homosexual, from his buttocks who later chase him. Well, this is a totally different category... this is not homosexuality. This is bisexuality in the sense of just lust. They chase after Lord Brahma, who is in a male body, and then, there is the twilight manifested, which is manifest as a female body, and they also chase that, and they give up chasing Lord Brahma, so in this case what we see is just lust—uncontrolled lust, which is very prevalent today—uncontrolled lust. People in male bodies, people in female bodies—uncontrolled lust. Now, uncontrolled lust is taking a person off the highest expression of human existence, and uncontrolled lust doesn’t allow us to access our spirituality. And uncontrolled lust, whether it’s coming out of whatever body a person is using, is uncontrolled lust. Just as illicit sex, coming out of whatever body it’s using, is illicit sex.

Now, I gave that initial discussion... we had a suicide in this community, that one devotee in Potomac had committed suicide, and this person had committed suicide mainly based on the anxiety, bewilderment, of being in a body that was third gender, and



having difficulty in trying to understand their role, their position in devotional service. As a matter of fact, in terms of teenagers, teenagers who are gay are four times more likely to commit suicide than other teenagers. So it's an interesting issue to look at closer and try to gain better insight on the human condition... getting better insight in how to analyze the body so we rise above the body. It's an interesting issue because in today's society, there are so much social concerns about people trying to posit their rights, and people trying to find themselves, people wanting to be valued. The reason suicide is on the rise and depression is on the rise has a lot to do with people having trouble in being truly valued and cared for. So there are people who are so-called straight who have all kinds of orientations due to this life and previous life involvement as well as heredity and socialization; people who are considered gay, who are gay in some cases because of biological orientation, some people because of sociological, and some people just due to a distinct choice. These are all various categories, which ultimately have to do with the individual and Krsna, and the individual following dharmic principles.

Now dharmic principles emphasize that, well, let's read what Krsna says Himself in Bhagavad-gita 7.11:

balam balavatam caham  
 kama-raga-vivarjitam  
 dharmaviruddho bhutesu  
 kamo 'smi bharatarsabha

"I am the strength of the strong, devoid of passion and desire. I am sex life which is not contrary to religious principles, O lord of the Bharatas [Arjuna]."

Read that again. Krsna is speaking in the seventh chapter "Knowledge of the Absolute." "I am the strength of the strong." Where there is strength, ultimately, it is coming from Me. I am the original sakti or provider of strength. I am devoid of passion and desire. "I am sex life which is not contrary to religious principles." Prabhupada's purport says:

"The strong man's strength should be applied to protect the weak, not for personal aggression. Similarly, sex life, according to religious principles (dharma), should be for the propagation of children, not otherwise. The responsibility of parents is then to make their offspring Krsna conscious."

So here, Krsna is taking the time Himself, to address sex by saying, or address some gender issue by saying, "I am sex life according to religious principles." Bhaktisiddhanta himself who was a naistiki-brahmacari, who was a lifetime celibate,



writes that sex life cannot be, and I'm paraphrasing, cannot be neglected or denied anymore than the life or soul itself, because ultimately the soul's natural position is union in the spiritual kingdom with the divine. So ultimately, sex life is an intricate part of intimacy and union. Just as in these physical bodies, sex life usually means genitals—stimulation and the connection, but only, or centered around such. We remind ourselves that the soul, the *atma*, one sense can perform the activities of all the other senses, and so so much, which we do not discuss much because it is not something just to be talked about lightly, but the nature of the spiritual world is constant association, constant union, constant intimacy—where one sense can perform the activities of all the other senses—and so therefore sex life is not centered around genital connection. Because the eye can hear, and the ear can smell, therefore one sense can have total or complete sense of satisfaction in union; one sense is constantly having union, and so are interacting in the spiritual world. So sex life in the material sense and in the spiritual sense is like oil in contrast to water. In both cases there is liquid, but in one case a different substance, but it is in connection with saying, ultimately it's the same basic foundation—liquidity. So Bhaktisiddhanta, who's firmly celibate, and we notice, that if we look at our legacy of Vaishnavas, and even those who've associated with the *Pancatattva*, we look at so many other *acaryas*, next we see householders who were engaged in sex life. Look at Bhaktivinoda; he had over a dozen children. And so we see that sex life is important; that relationships, family, is important; to a point where Krsna Himself says that He is that, when it is performed according to religious principles. And at the same time we see that “*maithunya-gara*,” the shackles of sex life, are one of the main things that bind us in the material world. How do we process it? There seems to be a contradiction, that, by not controlling the passion, one is surely guaranteed to take many, many physical bodies. At the same time, while offering everything to Krsna, one is already on their way out, doing things in a God-centered focus.

Why is it that there are so many “*samskaras*” in connection with sex life? There are so many *samskaras* in terms of impregnation, as well as delivery, as well as name ceremony after the infant has come, grain-taking ceremony, hair-cutting ceremony, so many *samskaras*. And in Vedic times, when people come together for sex life it was a celebration—it was even announced. And it was announced in such a way to give the community and the guru's blessing, and sex life was performed with tremendous rituals. Srila Prabhupada mentions about chanting fifty rounds—what is an intricate part of procreation? The people were not procreating with somebody else's wife, somebody else's husband; not procreating if they were not ready to honor the life; or in darkness; or in drugs; or in intoxication; it was the opposite. (There was) special music, special dress,



special scent of perfume, special cologne... and special meditation on Krsna, in such a way.

So, we may say that this transgender is significant for us now, why? Because, one, we can have another fragmentation in the movement now, if we're not careful, and it's somewhat occurring. It is important (in) that we have a larger percentage of gays in the movement than in society. One reason is that many gays are people who are ready to be celibate for lifetime—they're attracted to priestlyhood—priestly class of society—as well as you'll find a large percentage of gays amongst nuns and priests. Not that they came into the order, and then they started getting introduced to such activities, and then somehow became gay just based on some association, any more than people in general do not just become gay just based on some kind of an involvement or association, although some do. As we look more and more at how to make the world Krsna conscious, we look also more and more at how to make ourselves Krsna conscious, we look more and more at how to recognize that whatever we have in this time is part of our karma from previous lives, and how to use it.

Now, for instance, let's look at why this is important in terms of why it has some significance in sharing, and look at why it can be negative and why it can be a non-issue. (The) easiest thing is why it's a non-issue—take that one first. It's a non-issue because, whatever body we're in—whatever race, gender, even age and part of the world—it's all temporary, and we have to honor a consciousness above whatever the temporary situation is. Let's look at why it is dangerous, and then we'll look at why it is positive. It is dangerous because, for many people, the idea of expressing that they are third gender in the Vaishnava community will open up a floodgate. Just like, when we have divorce, and there are cases where it is necessary for somebody to get a divorce because it's just bad for both parties based on the situation, although the people can stay together and live happily and live virtuously, that is the best, but there are times when Prabhupada himself allowed divorce and there are times when he even pushed divorce. You may not realize that. Basically, the dharma is we do not want divorce; we'll go out of our way to try to minimize it from not happening. We make those vows, we are ready to make those vows, we commit ourselves. In the case of Sruti-kirti, Prabhupada actually encouraged to divorce. We see Prabhupada stopped making/arranging the marriages because people were divorcing so much, and he complained especially to us as Westerners, we're in and out of situations like anything, and it's a big embarrassment to our movement that there's so much divorce. I know another case where Prabhupada forced a person to take sannyasa, because the marriage was so terrible, and one way to protect the woman (was that) he forced the man to take sannyasa, pushed him to take sannyasa, so that the wife



would be able to go on with her Krsna consciousness and the man would have the chance to come up to sannyasa, or deal with the consequences, but would not cause problems to the wife who was trying to be quite Krsna conscious. I'm not even going to share who he is but it's a very classical case, this happened. What we notice is in Srila Prabhupada's books is he's always giving us the highest, most preferred standard, and for us to become most extremely Krsna conscious we should try to honor the most highest, preferred standard, and if we do that our Krsna consciousness becomes very speedy. So now, where this can be dangerous, and will be dangerous for some people—because this is not just happening in secular it's happening in our society now also, for instance, we have in many cases a larger percentage of gays than in society—that people will be coming out and some of them coming out will mean now I will not try to be so careful in expressing some of my desires and I will act upon some of these desires. And that's where Mohini-murti is saying about the fact that she knows some people can look at this in an unhealthy way, or they can pursue it in an unhealthy way, she doesn't want to be such a person.

Now, where it is very powerful, and can be very powerful in one's own evolution... We'll take a social example, for instance, I'm in a black body, but I'm not this body. At the same time, the fact that I'm in a black body, there are certain cultural things, linguistic things, that is a part of my life at this time because I'm in this body. As I recognize that myself personally, as the community recognizes that, it allows me to transcend it even more, of this uniform that I'm using at this time. I think that everybody is saying... that's impersonal. Somebody's from an Italian background or a Jewish background, that sometimes certain idiosyncrasy tendencies or cultural norms that's associated with it. And you appreciate that person on a deeper level by understanding some of that, while you look deeper at who that individual really is as spirit-soul. There are certain patterns that differ from somebody born in Australia, somebody born in India, somebody born in Africa, which by recognizing it, we can move faster toward transcending it. And by not recognizing it, sometimes that person or the community or the environment, will have greater difficulty in understanding, supporting, and loving that particular person. Because they will deny what that person's life space, field of activities, present "battle of Kuruksetra" is at this particular time. We try to attain something by being able to move from where we are, and being able to attain it in such a way. So for many Vaishnavas, they have been hurting inside, in being in an environment where they feel that people know how I think, people know what my present package is in this lifetime, really is; they would disown me, not appreciate me, would categorize me. And so many Vaishnavas are hurting inside from being able to feel more love in the community, from being able to feel more Krsna conscious, by having this secret that



they're having to cover up constantly in such a way. Or not being able to get help for whatever their particular issues are because they can't really say to the temple president, or to the GBC, or to the guru or sannyasi, they can't say, well look, I'm hurting in this way, I'm suffering in this way, or this is something I'm trying to deal with, something I'm trying to cope with, and so an intricate part of them that then is like living sort of a lie, or living in secrecy. Now, in a community of love, less and less secrets means more and more chance to see how to serve each other, how to help each other, how to learn from each other, etc. And so as Krsna says in the Govardhana Hill story, that Vaishnavas do not keep secrets. Or Rupa Goswami explains, in the process of "priti" or loving exchanges, we reveal our mind. And Bhaktivinoda of course shares that when we reveal our mind in community or in audience, it helps us to get more blessings, it gives us more protection, it helps us also to be more accountable. While we make "vrata" in public, it helps us to be more accountable.

So now, let us say someone, who biologically is in a certain third-gender orientation, and they are feeling that people are considering that because they have that orientation, that they are abnormal, that they are demonic, that they are a disturbance. Or someone says, just get out of it, prabhu; it's just by choice. Just like it's choice, for many people who are so-called straight, to make decisions on who they marry, who they have relationships with, some people by choice become pedophiles, by choice bisexual, by choice become sex-mongers. But there's also a biological aspect. We can say there's still choice there, from some previous life, there's some choice there, that somebody's in a handicapped body in this lifetime, but not necessarily in this lifetime, there's factors from the previous, from the past. There's some choice while you're in an Indian body, or you're in an American body, or you're in an African body—there's some choice there. Woman's body or a man's body. There's some aggregate choices from some previous life experiences that have unfolded. But now, in this lifetime, there is a package that's given to us, that now we have to deal with as we try to attain the Godhead.

So let me help you understand about something a little more because we want to deal with this ourselves, within our Vaishnava community, as we try to service the world, we have to understand what is in society to be able to serve and to preach and to help people. Now what happens medically, is that there are many intersexed people—not many, but people who are intersexed at birth. Their gender is somewhat ambiguous. The doctor often assigns a gender. Do you understand what happens? Sometimes people are intersexed. The doctor assigns a gender, and usually it's whatever the dominant concern is. It's not that the child has a chance to make a decision, or the child has a chance to unfold. Many times at puberty, not until puberty, does it become clear what the particular



orientation in fact is. So sometimes, one has been assigned a gender of being a female, and at puberty they're actually a male. And so they may pursue seemingly a gay orientation, but actually it's just the doctor's assignment that's off. So this is just to give you some idea of how complex what we're dealing with, and to lump everybody in is unhealthy, it's impersonal, it's insensitive and it's harsh, and if anything, that is what aligning being demonic because we are personalists and we are to try to encourage everybody in the siddhanta, in reaching the goal. Prabhupada had so many homosexuals around him, especially in the early days. We don't have to go there, but many were. Even when he dealt with people like Allen Ginsberg who was a known, active member in the gay community, Prabhupada tried to encourage him, but still spoke the philosophy, what is the philosophy. He didn't see him as less of a person because he had that kind of orientation. But he surely tried to give him the knowledge to help him become liberated out of bodily conceptions, etc.

So often devotees relegate things based on that story of Lord Brahma where this is a demonic arrangement because it is entities who are just lusty, and they were ready for lust, pursuing lust wherever and however it may come. Most actual people who are, let us say, genuine gays do not have affection for the opposite sex. Now, in anyone's body, there's a mixture. Women are attracted to women who are straight, men, in situations are attracted to other men, in general as well as in confinement. So what we really see is that the material world is a big mess, many people are pursuing sense gratification in all different kinds of ways, whether it's overt or whether it's covert, it's a problem. At the same time we see that it's all a perverted reflection of genuine need for intimacy, for union and for association. And that, as Bhaktisiddhanta said, can never really be eradicated. Why is it that the Goswamis, who were also celibate, were the most divinely absorbed in writing and in their mental "bhajana" and most intimacy relationship of conjugal? Because, this is natural to the soul.

In America, for instance, a man, it would be interesting in the case of a woman, but scientifically speaking, the average man thinks about sex life every thirty minutes. Women, biologically/physiologically being more sexually powerful than men, one wonders what the percentage is for them, and that is so-called normal, in the physical body. Now, the interesting thing's that every mammal species, except man, engages in sex life basically, categorically for procreation and mates during season, seasonally, this is natural. Humans have a tendency of not just engaging in sex life for procreation. Where we see mammals in their natural environment, wild animals for instance, that they engage in sex life during certain times, they're naturally stimulated, make contact, and it is for procreation. Not that it's just a routine thing, anymore than just thinking that



Bhaktivinoda and other pure devotees who had sex life just did it out of a routine thing, intimately. Now, we go to the touchy one, illicit sex. I've been having some exchanges with some of the scholars in our society, and what is coming clear is very interesting. It needs to be communicated, I think, better, for proper healthy relationships. There is no example of Prabhupada saying sex once a month in giving initiation. Initiation lectures, initiation discussions. The main presentation of sex once a month is a letter to Satsvarupa Goswami, and I can read some parts of it. Where he is mentioning, in addressing this particular issue, and what does he say? He says... Srila Prabhupada gives the once a month instruction. Prabhupada tells Satsvarupa Maharaja to follow this, quote, "as far as possible." This is an exact letter that Prabhupada gave. "But under no condition to use contraceptive methods."

Now, there is a top line, and there is a bottom line, and there's things that are outside the bottom or the top, if that makes any sense. (Laughs). There is the top line, the highest we try to strive for, there's a bottom line, and there's things that don't fit into that whole sequence. Let's give an example, but first thing, when Prabhupada would give initiation lectures, he would go into detail about gambling, intoxication, and no meat eating. He would go into detail about no meat-eating it also means no fish and eggs; it also means no coffee, and no, when he talks about intoxication, he would go into detail about also no tea and no coffee. He would go into detail on these things, every one of them, at initiation, but he did not go into detail about initiation about sex once a month. Why? There's a reason for that. Well why are we talking about these kinds of issues? (Laughs). What have I gotten myself into? We are trying to help devotees to stop getting divorced, to stop getting devotees engaging in "bhoga-tyaga," where they fast and then they binge, they binge and then they fast. We're trying to get devotees who have healthy understandings of how to have healthy family life, and understand what higher goals are, and understand what are their boundaries and also understand what is not acceptable.

Why do we find, through our Vaishnava line of other acaryas, they also do not mention once a month? Well, look us look at this, first from the Manu-samhita. You know, we have the Vedas given to us, passed down, you know through, by the mercy of Lord Brahma. And then we have principles of ethics and virtue given to us by Manu in the form of the Manu-samhita. And then we have principles given to us, this is Vedic general knowledge that Manu took certain parts and broke down to focus on particular principles for humankind, and then, let me see, Brhaspati, focused on certain things from the general Vedas emphasizing management, politics, law, administration, which are called, you know, the Artha Shastra—Manu Shastra, Artha Shastra—and then we have principles of sex life, relationships, expressing senses, the science of sex, taken from the



general Vedas, broken down, you see, by Nandi, the consort of Lord Siva, which is called the Kama Shastra, or now sometimes referred to as the Kama-sutra. Now, each of these are from the general Vedic knowledge emphasizing how to function the material body on this planet, basic things that are part of Vedic prayer time. And there's also, now, the other aspect of things that are transcendental, just like there is Bhagavata Dharma and there is Varnashrama Dharma. Varnashrama Dharma is like general Vedic things that are there for the best way how to live in the material world, how to function based on what is functional and sociologically correct for having a life based on "dharma." Now mind you, we're trying to be "sanatana-dharmis," but we look at dharma, we honor dharma, and we rise above dharma. If we minimize dharma, ethics, morality, righteousness, the mode of goodness, we're sure you're not going to become sanatana-dharmis. If we stay with dharma, which is piety in the mode of goodness, we won't become transcendental. But we use dharma as well as the mode of goodness as a stepping platform. So the Kama-sutra is one of those ways and efforts, and the Manu-samhita gives some basic principles of dharma that can give us some cues about sanatana-dharma, which we want to understand, analyze, and we want to be bigger than that, by understanding what it is that we're trying to be bigger than. Now in the Manu-samhita, it gives some interesting points in relationship to sex life. Just like in the Kama-sutra, it distinctly talks about tritiya-prakriti or it talks about third gender, third sex, lesbians, homosexuals, it talks about all of these things. It means that it's not something new, that's just existing recently, it's talking about this and the Kama-sutra was written back, you know 4 B.C., before Christ's era, etc., later compiled by certain personalities, but it's something that goes way, way back in time and addresses all of these things. Or just as we've heard that in Vedic times there were prostitutes, how all that fits in? Meaning that there were certain things going on in prescribed ways, just like there's certain ways in Vedic times, if you're going to eat meat, then there were certain rituals and certain things in that regard. But not that that was something that somebody who's trying to honor sanatana-dharma is going to follow or to be involved in, but it's surely there to be understood because it's in the Vedas.

Now hear from the Manu-samhita. It says, from age twenty to thirty, I mean it's very specific in relationship to sex life, and for somebody who's just following what is politically correct or what is stimulating for the body, these things will seem totally unnatural, impractical, impossible, etc. As we understand the value of celibacy, and there's many, many things about that, then we can understand also why abstention is important, and why minimizing just adhering to the bodily demands. The more that we are slaves of the body, the more it means another body is waiting for us. But the more



that we use the body in Krsna's service, then the more it also means that we are honoring the soul and one day soon we can be out of these bodies. But we have these bodies, and Krsna Himself says He is sex life according to religious principles, and we see that most of the devotees in our line were "grhastas," were householders, and they had children, and they had relationships, they had sex life, and we see that Bhaktisiddhanta is saying that sex life can not be thrown out of consciousness because intimacy and union is an intricate part of the soul itself. It's just a matter of the orientation, is it God-centered or not. OK, here, from age twenty to age thirty, this is from the Manu-samhita, it says... let me read this section first. This is from Satyaraja's book about the four principles, some of you may want to get this, it's a nice information about all the different principles. "While Manu is clear," this is Satyaraja speaking, "that celibacy is ideal, but is rarely achieved, and that a householder or a married person should have sex only for procreation, he is concerned with loving householders who want to engage in sexual activity for reasons other than procreation. He is aware that people are engulfed in three modes of nature—goodness, passion and ignorance—and depending upon just how these three affect one's psychological constitution, Manu says that restriction should vary." So Manu is saying the best thing is celibacy, the best thing is abstention. Manu is saying the best thing is sex life for procreation only. But Manu is also saying that people are in different modes of material nature, and therefore because they're in different modes there is also authorized ways of how such people in such modes can become transcendental. So let's see what Manu has to say. "From age twenty to thirty, the householder most serious about spiritual life will limit their sex to once a month." Age twenty to age thirty. "If they're second-class householders, they may have sex twice a month. If they are third-class, they may have sex more than twice a month, but their advancement in spiritual life will be difficult." Keep in mind mammals, most, practically, maybe all mammals, take a look at them closely, engage primarily in sex life seasonal, and for procreation there's natural captivation when there is time for procreation. Keep in mind even the Bible, Christianity, tells us that during seven days after menstruation there should not be sex life. During pregnancy, and just after pregnancy, there should not be sex life, emphasizing sex life mainly for procreation as such, and there is more even detailed information from Manu, and also in the Kama-sutra, about this as well. What we see is not only something in our tradition, but is in another tradition emphasized. In all traditions, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Tao, etc., no adultery, no fornication and accountable, responsible sex life in marriage etc., as an expression of service to the Godhead.



Now, look at this, age thirty to forty, first class. Just as we say, let's go like this. Let's take a vegetarian diet. First class, you're taking only prasadam, cooked by "paka" brahmana, only prasadam offered to the murti, to the Deity, only prasadam that Krsna will distinctly accept—first class, highest expression. Paka prepared, paka devotional environment, only offered to the Deity, only if the Deity will accept. Now, within boundary is prasadam that's vegetarian. It may not be prepared by first-class brahmanas, it may not be something that's offered to the Deity, it may be offered at your home, offered at some other place, whatever, but that's within the standard. But it's not the highest thing, it's a lower standard, but it's acceptable. This is serving as an example. But now, eating something that is not offered, or something that is not vegetarian, doesn't fit. It isn't standard, it goes outside, it's not accepted. Age thirty to forty. So what we're seeing is first class is sex, like in this age group, once a month only for procreation, and that's it. First class. Prabhupada in his letter and in initiation did not bring up "sex once a month," although he went deep into the other areas in detail. In his letter, for instance, it's a classical letter where he's mentioning this, he says about trying to do this, his words, his... let's see Prabhupada's exact words, his written word, is that "as far as possible," but his written words were also "but under no condition to use contraceptive methods." And so we'll find in these discussions the bottom line is that no use of contraceptive methods, and we also find in Prabhupada's discussion that he would mention the bottom line Prabhupada gave in marriage—no contraceptives, no procreation, it is certainly a fact that heterosexual... OK, this is another point. So, Prabhupada did discuss sometimes in initiation lectures no contraception, helping us to understand where the boundaries are.

Go back to Manu... age thirty to forty: "First class householders have sex only once in three months; the second class twice in three months; the third class more than twice." So these are some general guidelines that Manu is giving in such a way. Age forty to fifty: "The first class householder has sex only once in six months; second class twice in six months; third class more than twice." Older than fifty—give it up! (Laughs). Anyway, this is Manu giving some general guidelines about what is first class. So we understand what is considered sin, and what is not first class, or what is in boundary, and to work toward higher, etc.

Now one of the things that the Christians say is that honoring contraception brings a floodgate for homosexuality. Some of their lectures, their writings, we see like this, and so we see in Catholicism sex is also supposed to be for procreation, and we see as nuns and priests, that the rule is to be celibate. Now we don't have time, but there's a tremendous list of biological and social gains that are associated with celibacy, upon



hence the brain tissues are strengthened, the nervous system, and on and on and on, how it rejuvenates the body in many ways, how it can be channeled to allow one, of course, to focus more internally on the Godhead, on devotion, etc. And so we can see why Manu is giving us a situation where there's practically celibacy, where there's celibacy within marriage, and where sex life is aimed mainly for procreation, where you're inviting life, and you're ready to honor the life that you are inviting, therefore it becomes a ritual, it becomes a festival, it becomes a God-centered focus.

One or two other short things and then we want to stop. So this is some points from the Manu-samhita, given as messages for humanity for leading a life based on dharma. We see that... well I think we can summarize at this point and we'll open up for discussion because I want to just touch on it lightly. We had some other discussions earlier, in more detail, and we have our marriages we were discussing more about, you know, married life, in the marriage lecture. But we want to analyze and look at the points, at the perspective, of the fact that this is a genuine serious issue. Now, every day, two hundred fifty pornographic websites are created. I mean, people are just so sexed out and out of control in so many ways. In America, every minute a child is being sexually abused. So there is a serious need to gain more of a handle on one's sexuality; there is a serious need for people to be able to have a greater sense of control; there is a serious need for people to be able to have more healthier relationships, where they're having sex as spirituality, as a celebration, based on Biblical and religious shastra, scripture, Vedic scripture; there is a need for people to be able to bring in and honor a greater life, because their consciousness, of course the aggregate of their consciousness affects the kind of child that they can bring into the womb. There's a greater need for honoring of the "samskaras" or rites of passage, so that there's healthier children and healthier relationships, less suicide among kids, less anxiety about orientation, less divorce. So all of these things, you know, come to all of our own levels, in trying to see how to use our bodies more in the service of Krsna.

So let's summarize what we went over today. We mentioned how there are benefits as well as dangers in this kind of campaign of people trying to look closer at their identity. There are benefits in that we all have some package that we brought into this world—that's part of our imperfection, or part of our battle of Kurukshetra, or part of our facility to offer to Krsna; that nobody's physical body is wonderful and is the goal of life; that all of us having these physical bodies means, is a sign, that we have a lot of work to do. As the Bible says not flesh and blood can go back to the kingdom of God, then what is it, the soul. That Krsna says "dehino smin yatha dehe," that we have been transversing from infant to baby to child to adult and to elder and then death, and so it



goes on. Where the soul comes from... (Deity doors close). Jaya Sri Sri Radha-Damodara ki! (Offers pranams). Where does the soul go after we leave these bodies, that is our main concern. Not that we have these pie in the sky conceptions, we want to live for the moment, honoring the moment properly, while we prepare for the future. The future is being prepared based on how we honor the present moment. That there is a rising concern, outside of spiritual circles as well as inside of spiritual circles, for people who are in third-gender bodies, of how to be able to communicate their situation, to be understood, to offer value and to be able to rise above whatever their particular concerns are as well as anybody else's concerns. There's also a tendency for people to exploit whatever their identity is, either straight, or gay, or transex... or whatever. That somebody who has a manipulative, exploitative mentality, that they will exploit whether they are in a communistic environment, an autocratic, a monarchical; whether they're in commerce, or they're in education, or that they're in political or even religious—they have an exploitive mentality. So some people will exploit this in the sense of considering, "Well, yes, it is in the Vedic shastra, it is something that's always been there, and therefore let me enjoy." Well Manu has given, as well as our acharyas, have given us ways how to refrain from illicit activities whatever our gender or whatever our environment is and how to control the senses and not be slaves of the senses. That Brhaspati has given us the Artha Shastra; that Lord Siva and Nandi, his consort, have given us the Kama-sutra, where these kinds of things are discussed with all kinds of details; where Manu has given us the Dharma Shastra; and all of this is a part of varnashrama-dharma—basic knowledge in how to be healthy humans ethically and morally. And then of course we have the Bhagavata Purana, or we have Bhagavata-dharma, which is helping us to be transcendental. We want to be hungry and eager and determined to embrace Bhagavata-dharma while we try to understand the nature of this body and the material world.

We talked about that there is different reasons why people are in different kinds of bodies, in this life and in previous lifetimes, and different reasons why somebody finds themselves in a package that's third gender. Some of it is hormone and chromosomal arrangement; some of it has to do with that person being blessed so that they could feel different, so that they could not feel themselves a part of the world and become more interested in honoring the soul. Some of our sannyasis and others who are third gender have used that in a way now to be more focused in their devotion, to be less situated in any kind of orthodox environment or mindset and to focus more on Krsna with celibacy. That if we can be celibate, wonderful, we can simplify our lives and be focused just on addressing the soul. But that is rare; it is understood that that is not the ordinary, and so



therefore Manu is giving ways on how to be first class. And if we can't be first class, one has to understand what constitutes first class to come up to first class, and he let us know what is outside the boundaries, that is, not first, second, third, fourth, fifth class, but is a deviation. And we've had a chance to look at some of these things today, by looking at Krsna Himself saying in 7.11, 7.11 (chuckles), in 7.11, that He is sex life according to religious principles, that Krsna, you know, posits us by letting us know that, yes, sex life is there, and according to dharma, according to religious principles, according to ethics and morality, Krsna says, "I am that, that is glorious, and I am honored and worshipped in such a way." So, let us see what you want to, what questions you have. I took some time myself to look at the Kama-sutra, and Mother Indrani to order for me, to look at the unabridged Kama-sutra, just to look at these things closer because I wanted to understand a little better. Why does Siva, why does Nandi discuss these, you know, these kind of issues and then what, in a way, such things are being discussed. And I saw that, yes, that since time immemorable there have been these kinds of classifications and there have been various ways how people can honor it in the right way, and ways how people can also exploit it, just as people exploit anything, and all things, based on their consciousness and based on the modes of material nature that they're in. We said there's a good part about this, is that individuals should not have to feel that they're hiding something that they brought into this world that's part of their experience in Krsna consciousness in this lifetime. At the same time, persons should understand what these higher goals are and try to acquire and attain such higher goals.





The Gay and Lesbian Vaishnava Association is an international organization dedicated to the teachings of Lord Caitanya, the importance of all-inclusiveness within His mission, and the Vedic concept of a natural third gender. Its purpose is to educate Vaishnavas, Hindus and the public in general about the “third sex” as described in Vedic literatures. This knowledge will help to correct many of the common misconceptions that people hold today concerning third-gender people (gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, the intersexed, etc.). In addition to this, GALVA wishes to provide a friendly and positive-oriented place where third-gender devotees and guests can associate together and utilize their time to learn more about Krsna consciousness and advance in spiritual life.

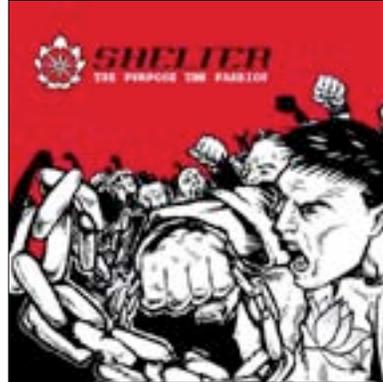
**Online at: [www.galva108.org](http://www.galva108.org)**



**Krishnacore**

*Sven Davisson*

As the 70's punk revolution moved into the 80's a number of punk and American hardcore youth became increasingly dissatisfied with the anarchic and nihilistic philosophy that had permeated the scene since the revolution first swept forth from streets of London. Seeing so many of those around them descend into downward spirals of drugs, sex and self-abuse, some individuals began to coalesce into an internal counter scene. These teens began to form their own bands, write their own music and expound their own basic philosophy based on abstaining from drugs, alcohol, tobacco, illicit sex and, often, meat.



They began painting black X's on the back of their hands, taking the image from the stamp given to underage kids at hardcore shows. In 1981 the band Minor Threat released the song "Straight Edge," codified the developing sentiment and gave the movement a name:

I'm a person just like you  
 But I've got better things to do  
 Than sit around and fuck my head  
 Hang out with the living dead  
 Snort white shit up my nose  
 Pass out at the shows  
 I don't even think about speed  
 That's something I just don't need  
 I've got the straight edge

One of the most influential skinhead bands on the US hardcore scene in the late 80's was Youth of Today made up of Ray Cappo and John Purcell joined later by Drew Thomas, Craig Setari and Richie Birkenhead. The band released *Break Down the Walls* in 1986 followed by *We're Not In This Alone* in 1988. Eventually Cappo became



disillusioned with the violence that had all too quickly come to characterize the straight edge and hardcore scenes in the latter half of the 80's. Drawn by his growing interest in Eastern spirituality, Cappo departed the scene and moved to India.

While in India he became a Vaishnava monk. He was not in India long before deciding to return to the West and continue his musical work. In an interview with Beats e-zine, Cappo commented "I think music is like my 'dharma' or calling... so music did and will always magnetically drag me back even though some times I move away from it." After his return, still holding true to his conversion to Krishna Consciousness, he formed the band Shelter. They released their first album *Perfection of Desire* in 1990 on Cappo's own label Revelation Records—the insert including an interview with H.G. Satuaraja Prabhu. A second album *Quest for Certainty* followed in 1991 on Equal Vision Records and included a spiritual lecture by H.H. Hridayananda dasa Goswami.

The devotee run Equal Vision soon stood at the center of a growing Krishnacore movement. In addition to Shelter they also released albums Krishna Consciousness inspired bands 108 and Prema. Zines such as *Krishna Grrrl* and *War on Illusion* appeared on the scene. John Bloodclot and Harley Flanagan of the legendary Lower East Side skinhead band Cro-Mags had both converted to Krishna Consciousness and their influence was strongly felt in the New York scene.

Porcell described what they were doing as "bhajans for the 90's" drawing a direct connection between Shelter's music and the Vaishnava tradition of devotional singing. Equal Vision released a collection of songs recorded at the New York Krishna temple. The album included a strikingly beautiful track "Koda Nitai" featuring vocals by Sri Keshava. The Australian Sri soon went on to become lead singer for the more pop-oriented and upbeat Baby Gopal whose self-titled album included "Boys Against Girls," "Govardhan" and "Lost Generation."

Shelter continues to tour and record. They released the honest and personal *The Purpose, the Passion* (Supersoul/Century Media) in 2001 and, just recently, an album of ancient Indian devotional songs *Shelter Bhajans*. Sri also released a solo album *Gravity Reminds Me*. Ray Cappo has also made a film chronicling the history of the New York hardcore scene *Talk about Unity: New York hardcore/punk '82-88*. Cappo also teamed up with Jake (Crucifix) and Sri to record a CD of new songs *Touching Water*, which includes a cover of Generation X's "Kiss Me Deadly."

More resources available at the Ashé website.



## Life After the Closet

*Payam Ghassemlou, Ph.D.*

Growing up with Iranian family traditions made my coming out more complicated since the family is the most significant element of Iranian life. For those of us who immigrated to the U.S., family becomes even more important source of survival living in a foreign land. The conflict between my desire for coming out and my sense of duty toward my family grew stronger when I turned twenty years old. Since my sense of independence was dominated by my family traditions and relationships, coming out was not only about accepting being gay, but also redeeming my sense of individuality. Coming out to my family at age twenty-three was followed by a period of rejection and isolation, which ultimately made me stronger. Since I was a child, my family relationships and my heterosexual friends were my only source of support and coming out was a terrifying act of losing this support. Ultimately, coming out was a step toward creating an identity outside my family, which has helped me to become more individuated.

Life after the closet is more exciting now because of all the choices that are available to me. When I was in the closet, I was so blinded by my internalized homophobia and my need for family approval that I did not have any understanding of my purpose in life. My family, like most Iranian families, centered on worrying about people's judgment. I learned from my family that my purpose of life was to earn people's respect by becoming educated and successful. Provoking envy in people meant I was on the right track. I feel a sense of grief for spending many years living in the prison of my Iranian family values, which denied my gay essence. I have come along way since then, and, now, I stop and ponder what is the true meaning of my gay life.

When I speak of my gayness or gay life, I am not solely referring to my sexuality. My gay essence has many dimensions, and sexuality is only one of them. I don't define people by their extroverted sexual behaviors. For example, I don't consider a celibate gay man no longer gay because he has stopped having sex. Being gay is an evolving process which has to do more with self-realization, and sex can be part of this self-realization. Coming out which is essential part of self-realization starts with a response to a call from within which is unique to gay individuals. For me, this calling initially manifested as certain feelings of longing that I would experience in the presence of handsome men. The calling reminds me of one of Jalal-ud-Din Rumi's (1207-1273 A.D.) poems which translated by Coleman Barks,



“You have been a prisoner of a little pond.  
I am the ocean with turbulent flood.  
Come merge with me...”

In this poem being prisoner of a little pond can be metaphor of being stuck in the closet, and there is an intense calling to dive into the ocean. The ocean is a metaphor for the unconscious in which homoerotic feelings reside and need to be conscious. Understanding these homoerotic feelings as longing for a union with the Beloved has helped me to honor them as part of my journey of self-realization. By diving into the ocean of my unconscious, I have been struggling to redeem the pearl of my gay essence.

#### **Awakening to my own homophobia**

Psychological injuries that were inflicted on me as result of growing up gay in a homophobic world needed to be addressed after my coming out. I was made to feel ashamed by heterosexist society for being different. As a kid, each time I heard the word fag it left a scar on my soul. This homophobic mistreatment lead me to develop feelings of inferiority. The seed of internalized homophobia was planted inside me each time I was being picked on for being different. My life after the closet included coming out inside and becoming aware of my hurt and rage around this homophobic mistreatment. Coming out inside is about approaching my unconscious and understanding my complexes. Approaching my unconscious has been the most important part of the journey of my self-realization, and having guides in this process is essential. As Rumi portrays this, “O seeker without the shadow of a pir (teacher) the clamor of the beast will torment you.” Also, Hafiz emphasis the need for a guide in the following poem,

“Do not take a step  
on the path of love without a guide.  
I have tried it  
one hundred times and failed.”

I have turned to individuals, including psychotherapists, for guidance who have been involved on their own path of self-realization. They have provided me with positive self affirming experiences and psychological tools. For example, dream work, active imagination, writing personal essays, and having empathy for my repressed feelings



from childhood by personifying them as my gay inner children have been important psychological tools that I have been given.

### **Dream Work**

When I wake up in the morning before I start my day, I write down what I dreamt about during the night. Later, I can come back to it and find out what my unconscious was trying to tell me. Dream work has been an important tool in my struggle to come out inside and gain consciousness about my internalized homophobia. One of the Sufi poets who has inspired me to pay attention to my dreams is Rumi. In one of his poems on dream, Rumi states,

“Many wonders are manifest in sleep:  
in sleep the heart becomes a window.  
One that is awake and dreams beautiful dreams,  
he is the knower of God. Receive the dust of his eyes.”

Many of my dreams, which have shed light on my feelings of hopelessness around same sex love usually involves me experiencing rejection by a beautiful man. In my dream, sometimes he appears as a blonde and sometimes as a brunet with a half naked body and beautiful chest looking away from me. I try to look into his eyes with an intense longing for his kiss, but he usually ignores me. He leaves me painfully devastated, and I wake up with a sorrow in my heart. Analyzing such dreams in the context of my early childhood dynamics has helped me to understand how my inner homophobia can lead to feelings of hopelessness around same sex love. Once an inner negative force is exposed and becomes conscious to me, it tends to lose its power over me. Having an empathic understanding toward it has been a healing experience.

A real life example of my dreams of rejection by beautiful men, which is my projection of the soul figure, happened during a period of my life when I had desire to go up and talk to attractive single gay men. I found myself feeling already rejected and hopeless before I even gave myself a chance to talk to them. I am not alone with this dynamic of feeling already rejected in the presence of my soul figure. I see it everytime I go to a gay bar. Gay men staring in space and not approaching one another stems from being caught in this hopeless place. Drinking alcohol becomes an escape from the pain of this hopeless situation and explains partly why substance abuse is such a common problem in the gay community.



### **Active Imagination**

Working with the power of active imagination has been a transformative experience for me. This technique has helped me to use the power of my imagination to consciously explore my inner world. Hence, I can have dialogue with the different parts of myself that live in my unconscious and learn more about myself. I can even use active imagination to re-enter my dream when I am awake and dialogue with my dream figures.

In one of my experiences using active imagination, I saw my internalized homophobia in the form of a dark castle that contains my gay essence which I struggle to liberate. In my imagination, I see myself struggling to find an entry to the castle. It seems impossible to find an entry to the castle in order to redeem my gay essence. A feeling of hopelessness began to take over, and I find myself in despair. To work with these feelings, I began to recite the following poem from Rumi,

“The way of love is not  
a subtle argument.

The door there  
is devastation.

Birds make great sky-circles  
of their freedom.  
How do they learn it?

They fall, and falling,  
they’re given wings.”

Then, I find a secret doorway to the castle. Once inside the castle, I need a magic power to transform the castle of internalized homophobia to a beautiful garden where I can be drunk on the wine of the beloved. The magic lies in making emotional discoveries about my suffering of growing up gay. The expression of my repressed feelings, which includes my rage in relation to the castle of homophobia had a transformable effect. I was no longer inside the castle fighting. Instead, I was tasting sweet lips of the beloved in a garden called Bagh-e Shiraz.



### Writing Essays

Writing and publishing personal essays has helped me to challenge my inner toxic shame. Each time I want to publish a personal story with my full name on it, I have to deal with the voice of shame that tries to silence me. The voice of shame usually attacks me by asking, “What people (mardom) are going to think?” The only way I know how to stand up to this voice is to share my writings with others. As Rumi said, “Live where you fear the most.” Shame and fear lose their power over me each time I come out of hiding and let my experiences be heard. I am hoping my writings can inspire other gays and lesbians, especially those from Middle East, to view gayness as a gift and not something to be ashamed of. It makes me sad to know about the rate of depression and suicide among gay people due to lack of self-acceptance.

### Gay Inner Child

The concept of the inner child has been a valuable healing tool to help me personify my repressed childhood feelings and consciously experience them. The inner child refers to the child I once was and which continues to live in my adult body. When I am not conscious of this inner child, I tend to merge with him and reenact his experiences. The way I was treated as a gay child is the way I could treat myself and/or others unless I work on not reenacting my homophobic childhood experiences. Reawakening childhood feelings and experiencing their injustice can give birth to new feelings that are not associated with these experiences. These new feelings have helped me to feel more liberated in my own skin.

### My Gay Root

My attempt to be self realized as the core of my gay life has gotten me closer to my Persian roots and my gay ancestors. I am so grateful that I am improving my Farsi so I can go to the direct source instead of reading a heterosexist translation of Persian poems. When I need validation of gay love, I read love poems by Sadi, Hafiz, Rumi, and other Persian poets. They have written hundreds of love poems on same sex desire, which indicates a great deal of Persian literature is based on homosexuality. When I need to feel encouraged around my struggle to break away from the heterosexual collective, I read life stories of great Sufis. Unfortunately, most English translations of classical Persian literature are misleading and do not speak the truth. For example, most poetry by Hafiz has been translated in a way that makes the reader think he is writing a love poem for the opposite sex. In reality, Hafiz always honored same sex love in his poetry. Public display of homoerotic love has never been easy, and Rumi portray this in the following poem,



“I saw you last night in the gathering,  
but could not take you openly in my arms,  
so I put my lips next to your cheek,  
pretending to talk privately.”

### **Spirituality**

Life after the closet and my ongoing struggle to individuate from my family has helped me to renew my relationship with God and spirituality. Growing up, other people imposed their understanding of Islam on to me. As a child, I was very impressionable and was made to believe that God is somewhere faraway putting people in hell or heaven. Having same sex desire meant my place would be deep in hell. I already experienced hell when I was in the closet and murdering my homoerotic feelings. Today, my understanding of God and spirituality does not involve following organized religions. A great Sufi, Jami, once said, “Why listen to second hand reports when you can hear the Beloved speak himself?” In the name of Islam, many atrocities have been done to gay and lesbian people. Religion has often been misused to oppress gay and lesbian people. The founders of Islam and Christianity never advocated hatred toward same sex lovers. No homosexuals ever were punished while these prophets were alive. In fact, Islam has made it okay for men to have sex with their male servants when away from their wives while traveling.

I have learned from Sufism that spiritual life is a love affair. God is my Beloved, and he reveals himself to me in the beautiful faces of other men. Gazing into a man’s beautiful face and loving him can be a practice for loving Allah. At first, the love for the Beloved (Allah) get projected on beautiful men and through an erotic love affair with them one can experience divine ecstasy. As Rumi expressed, “Thirst drove me down to the water where I drank the moon’s reflection.”

Eventually, one needs to learn to stop projecting the Beloved outside of himself and work on uniting with the inner Beloved. As Rumi puts it,

“The minute I heard my first love story.  
I started looking for you,  
Not knowing how blind that was.  
Lovers don’t finally meet somewhere.  
They are in each other all along.”



Rabia a female Sufi (some Muslim orthodox figures typically frown upon her unmarried life and her withdrawal from society as a path to God) expressed her love affair with the Beloved in the following poem,

“O God, the stars are shining  
 All eyes have closed in sleep;  
 The kings have locked their doors.  
 Each lover is alone, in secret, with the one he loves.  
 And I am here too: alone, hidden from all of them-  
 With You.”

Sufis were not the only mystics who experienced God as the Beloved. For example, ecstatic union with the divine was experienced by the Spanish saint, Teresa of Avila (1515-1582 A.D.) who was a Christian Mystic. She was so in love with God that in her last breath, Teresa uttered these words; “ Beloved, it’s time to move on. Well, then, may your will be done. Oh, my Lord and my Spouse, the hour that I have longed for has come. It’s time for us to meet one another.” ( Translation by Mirabai Starr) Reading about her journey to God has enhanced my understanding of the spiritual love affair.

As my life outside the closet unfolds, I am beginning to hear my Beloved calling.

From the beautiful faces of gay men and their sweet kisses on my lips to the cry of my sorrow, all contain traces of His voice. I saw His eternal beauty (jamal) in the face of my lovers. “ Wheresoever you turn, there is His Face” (Sura 2:115). His kingdom is everywhere. Sometimes I feel him in my solitude and sometimes in a crowded gay bar. He is revealing himself in every moment. For many years, my homophobic upbringing convinced me that He does not love me. He does love all His creations including gays and lesbians. God said, “ I am a hidden treasure. I wanted to be known, so I created the Universe in order to be known.” Our gay heart can be a place where he can see his own reflection. But we must polish our heart in order for the Beloved to see himself. I polish my heart through self-realization and remembrance of the Beloved.

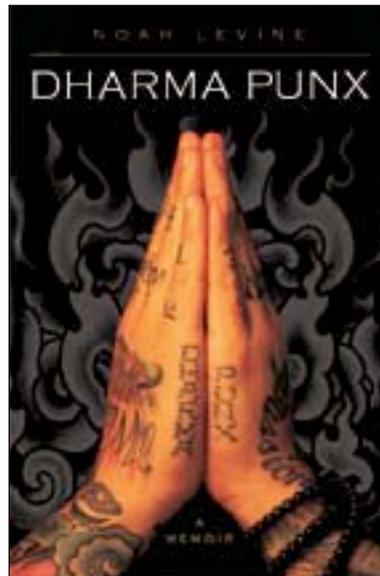


## **Dharma Punx & Hardcore Zen**

*Review by Sven Davisson*

**Dharma Punx: A Memoir**, Noah Levine  
(Harper SanFrancisco, 2003, 202pp, \$23.95)

**Hardcore Zen: Punk Rock, Monster Movies & the Truth About Reality**, Brad Warner  
(Wisdom Publications, 2003, 202pp. \$14.95)



On several occasions I have found myself on the sidelines of discussions revolving around young people and the Dharma. The tack these conversations usually take is how to get the “younger generation” interested in Buddhism. As the post-sitting discussion begins, I look around the room—realizing that I am the only one present below the age of 40 (I am being kind). These discussions rest on two assumptions: one, that the younger generation should be practicing the Dharma and, two, that their Dharma will be the same as that of those speaking.

While it may be that everyone can benefit in some way from hearing the Dharma, it may not be that the language of the Dharma is the same generation to generation. The youth generation may indeed be couched in a different vernacular, based on different experience that is better suited to present those Buddhist truths that transcend time and language.

I would like to hope that these two books and their respective authors are the first profound steps in shaping the Dharma language of generations X and Y. Just like Bodhidharma had to bring the Dharma from India to China, members of our generation will be needed to bring the Dharma from the generation that preceded it.

Though with different life experiences and with different approaches, both *Dharma Punx* and *Hardcore Zen* are the beginnings of a niche. They are two of the first voices to emerge from a growing group of Gen X punks turned Buddhists.



Noah Levine, author of *Dharma Punx*, is the son of meditation instructors Patricia Washko and Stephen Levine. He is currently involved in teacher training with Jack Kornfield at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. Levine himself is director and co-founder of Mind Body Awareness Project, a program that works with incarcerated youth.

*Hardcore Zen* author Brad Warner is a former member of the influential hardcore band Zero DeFex and the creative mind behind the critically lauded *Dementia 13*. Warner currently lives in Japan working for the studio responsible for the television series *Ultraman*. He received Dharma transmission from Zen master Gudo Wafu Nishijima.

Both books are written in the first person with varying emphasis on personal experience.

Levine spends much of *Dharma Punx* talking about the life that eventually brought him to meditation and the Buddha's teachings. Like most young people he rejected the belief paradigms of his parents, dismissing both meditation and Buddhism. He began hanging out in the punk/skater scene and quickly started using the drugs endemic to that scene.



Noah Levine



From the plagues of this life, he was incarcerated several times. During one of these stints in the hands of the correctional system, Levine finally decided to heed his father's simple advice and watch his breathing. It was through this first step at meditation that Levine made his way ultimately to the Dharma. He discovered the straight edge movement within the hardcore scene and began to identify with Krishna Core, the spiritual side of the straight edge scene. He began to attend workshops and spiritual retreats where he met the English born monk Ajahn Amaro who eventually became his teacher.

In *Hardcore Zen*, Warner discusses his own road to the Dharma. Like Levine, Warner was part of



the American hardcore scene. He managed to escape the potential for criminal activity and focused on the musical aspects—first as leadsinger for Zero DeFex and, later, as the creator of Dementia 13. Warner ended up moving to Japan where he realized one of his dreams and landed a job working in monster films.

Warner spends more time in his book actually discussing the philosophical aspects of the Dharma. He includes a very telling explication of the Heart Sutra. He paints in vivid detail the road that led him, very reluctantly, to receiving Dharma transmission—completing the transition from punk rocker to Zen master.

Important for their generation, both Levine and Warner deconstructs the Dharma, questioning it every step of the way. Through this they extract the important elements while leaving aside the more potentially loaded religious aspects. In this way they begin to cast the Buddha's truths in ways that are more accessible to their generation—born as it is from skepticism and not the idealism of the generation before—quoting Johnny Lydon, Henry Rollins and Bart Simpson along the way.



Brad Warner

Noah Levine's website: <http://www.dharmapunx.com>

Brad Warner's websites: <http://www.hardcorezen.com>

<http://www2.gol.com/users/doubtboy/>

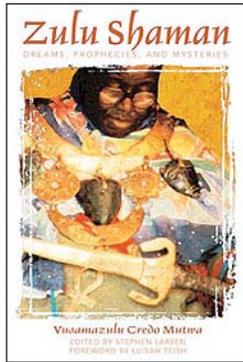


**Reviews**

**Zulu Shaman: Dreams, Prophecies & Mysteries, Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa**

(Inner Traditions/Destiny Books, \$16.95)

Reviewed by Eric K. Lerner



In America, when we mention “Afrikan religions,” we usually mean West Afrikan religions. That is because the West Afrikan people constituted the greatest numbers of slaves. Yoruba, Fon and Akhan religions outlived the period of slavery in the Caribbean through the savvy of their followers. Permutations of those faiths have grown United States. Their base of followers now includes those of non-Afrikan descent. However, West Afrikan beliefs represent only a fraction of the whole of spiritual wisdom of a vast continent. Through works like Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa’s book Zulu Shaman, Published by Destiny

books, more Afrikan Wisdom now comes to light in the West.

Mutwa combines autobiography and story telling in Zulu Shaman. He strikes me as being one heck of a storyteller, and I mean this respectfully. In Zulu culture, a priest shares sacred knowledge with followers through telling myths. A priest who is a skilled raconteur can reach a large number of people because of his skill. The act of narrating sacred stories becomes a communal prayer. The better the story telling technique, the more effective the prayer. Mutwa seamlessly weaves his personal experience together with the myth. In doing so he creates emotional resonances in the reader that play off one another. Encountering both Mutwa’s legends and his life for the first time is very moving.

Obviously, Zulu Shaman is not a textbook. You are not going to read it and be able to cook up your very own Zulu love potions. You will not discover what leaves were used to empower the mighty Zulus who defeated the British nearly a century ago. What you will discover is a powerful faith, both personal and cosmic, that is threatened with extinction. Mutwa introduces outsiders to his unique worldview in an effort to preserve his beloved for posterity. He seeks to convey its beauty and relationship to other systems of spirituality. These are aspects of his faith, which can be grasped by us without direct exposure.



Mutwa encourages us to see that there is more to join us in our unique spiritual quests than separate us. It is a very simple message. However, it gets lost in many, if not most, books on religion. When one sees a book with a title such as Zulu Shaman, one may expect a recipe book or anthropological analysis. Mutwa stays clear of these approaches, although he does make intelligent comparisons between aspects of Zulu myth and other culture's. He is a literate man who extols the virtues of educating one's self about the outside world. This contradicts racist notions about illiterate "witch doctors," which are still far too prevalent.

Mutwa's life has been shaped by faith and the volatile politics of South Africa. He weaves a rich tableau of mother goddesses and tricksters (many of whom we have encountered by different names in our respective faiths) amidst a climate of discrimination, urbanization and violence. Mutwa is not an apologist for his fellow Zulus. He portrays them as real people with both noble and wicked propensities, whose behaviors often echo those depicted in ancient stories.

The worlds he paints with words are very immediate. It is in these depictions that one comes across something most unexpected in book on religion: the presence of extraterrestrials. This shocking inclusion may prove to be of most interest to prospective readers of Zulu Shaman. Mutwa matter-of-factly gives accounts of extra terrestrials and their role in Zulu faith. He carefully documents his own close encounters and those of his fellow holy men throughout South and East Afrika. He then cites specific types of extraterrestrials and their unique behaviors. He even gives common sense advice on how to handle communications with them when appropriate. The beings he portrays are similar to those described in popular books like *Communion* and *The Mothman Prophecies*.

Mutwa indicates that some E.T.'s are friendly and benefit mankind, while others may not be friendly or have readily comprehensible motives. He does not sensationalize this. They are part of his cosmology. He acknowledges that there is more to heaven and earth than even the most sage elders will ever realize.

Mutwa breaks with traditional secrecy regarding this subject, as well as many others. (I do not want to get into any debate about extraterrestrials, but I will attest that I am familiar with extraterrestrial mythos from my Yoruba elders.) Mutwa demonstrates that there is considerable discussion of extraterrestrial life among the holy men and people of Afrika and that they are perhaps wisely reluctant to share it with Westerners. He states that he wishes that Western authorities would entertain a more open dialogue on the subject. The issue here is honesty. Mutwa believes that keeping people in ignorance



over any topic is oppressive. When communication shuts down, fear and hatred have a beginning.

Mutwa reveals much about Zulu faith, because he is elderly and does not have a successor. His son who was to succeed him was brutally murdered by South African rebels who believed that his holding on to traditional faith was tantamount to collaboration with the White Oppressors. Mutwa has suffered greatly from the evil in this world. In his case, it has come at the hands of both a racist government and an oppressed people who adopt the mannerisms of their own oppressors.

He, himself, is an accomplished writer, sculptor and painter. His work celebrates Zulu beliefs. He regards creativity as a type of prayer in action. This is an integral part of other Afrikan religions. Artistry and creativity are powerful forces to recognize and enable the divinity in mankind. Mutwa realizes this through his own work and encouraging others.

The one thing missing in *Zulu Shaman* is color pictures of Mutwa's artwork. There are some black and white photographs of his sculptures and paintings which give tantalizing hints of his talent. I want to see better representations of his creative gifts.

I enjoyed *Zulu Shaman*. I was inspired by the accomplishment one man can achieve through his commitment to faith. Mutwa's account of his shamanistic initiation encouraged me to relive elements of my own. Again, there is much described in *Zulu Shaman* that we as humans share. Mutwa's observations do have wide indications. For instance he notes the strain an overabundance of television and radio waves have on Psychic faculty in urban settings. He illustrates an effect I see on myself and other people I know who embrace Shamanistic endeavors.

Mutwa sets an example for what a shaman can aspire to be. In spite of health challenges and threats on his life by the same forces who murdered his son, Mutwa has established a thriving colony for both artists and shamans in South Africa. Furthermore, he has made a crucial first step in documenting his faith for those who share this space-time with him and for generations to come.

**In the King's Service**, Katherine Kurtz  
(Ace Books, 2003, 359pp. \$23.95)

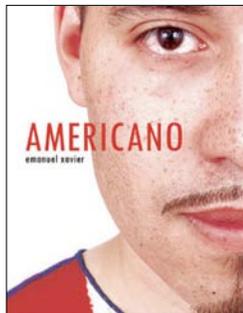
After several years of waiting, finally there is a new book in Katherine Kurtz's long-running Deryni series. *King's Service* though billed as "a novel of the Deryni" is actually the first book in the Childe Morgan trilogy which chronicles the early life of King



Kelson's confidant Alaric Morgan. This novel takes place during the reign of King Donal Haldane grandfather to Kelson. In the Deryni chronology, the trilogy comes just before the Chronicles of the Deryni. Like all of Ms. Kurtz works this work demonstrates her ability to create an intricate plot and establish pace which keeps one reading. Her knowledge of the subtleties of the medieval court and church shows throughout and her unparalleled agility at weaving this knowledge through a compelling story line is unparalleled. It's been over thirty years since the appearance of the first Deryni novel and one still comes away wanting more.

### Americano

Emanuel Xavier (Suspect Thoughts Press, 2002, 73pp. \$12.95)



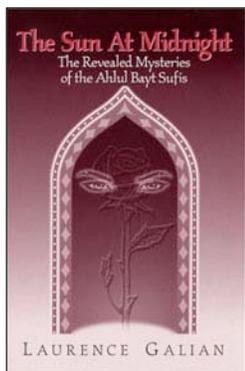
*Americano* is the latest book of poetry, released 2002, from the author of the collection *Pier Queer* and the novel *Christ-like*. Emanuel Xavier possesses a strong and original voice. Though only 72 pages, *Americano* is one of the freshest poetry collections I've read in years. Each poem, a force unto itself, grabs the reader with its pointed intensity and demands both undivided attention and unambiguous respect. The poet, though thoughtful and self-reflective at times, is absolutely unregretting and unapologetic throughout. Multiple thematic threads weave through the various poems—the poet's own past: the streets, as a prostitute, the drug and, often overlapping, club scene, his success with his earlier work. Uncompromising introspection intermixes with current romances. Dual threads of spirituality and religion thread through the work, the warp to the woof of the collection. Xavier's imagery moves seamlessly from the morphological harshness of Catholicism—the crucifixion, the stigmata, the thorns, the wounds of Christ—to “the Yoruba breezes” of the Afro-Caribbean spirituality of the Orishas. The collection ends with the author looking forward to a hard-fought, almost positivist, ‘evolution’ in “Undone”: “I am not done writing yet/the future is in our words.” ¡Coño Carajo! Fucking brilliant!



**The Sun at Midnight: The Revealed Mysteries of the Ahlul Bayt Sufis,**

Laurence Galian (Quiddity, Inc, 2003, 778pp, \$24.99)

Reviewed by Joseph Gelfer



Sufism is becoming increasingly popular, thanks in part to the Sufi poet Rumi whose work currently sells in larger volumes than any other poet in America. But Rumi aside, many people know little of Sufi traditions, except perhaps of Whirling Dervishes. The main reason for this is not that Sufism has done a better job of preserving its secrets than the mystical traditions of Christianity or Judaism, but more because Sufism's binding with Islam acts as a stumbling block for a Western audience. Laurence Galian is in a good position to overcome this issue, being both American and an initiate of two Sufi orders, the Nur

Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order and the Rifa'i-Marufi Order.

The Sun at Midnight is essentially four books in one: a selection of spiritual practices; a fictional tale; a history of the Ahlul Bayt; and an exploration of spiritual development. Of these four interlocking strands the first two are the most accessible. The numerous spiritual practices offer useful ways of accessing Sufi contemplative activity. The fictional tale is about a homeless man who has the door to deeper spiritual awareness opened to him by an enigmatic stranger. The plot begins to thicken with the history of the Ahlul Bayt, the direct family of the Prophet Muhammad. Galian provides a detailed account of how the Ahlul Bayt's succession to Muhammad was interrupted in a nefarious manner by those who sought political advancement. This alternate succession provided the basis of Sunni Islam, which is followed by around ninety percent of all Muslims. The telling of the Ahlul Bayt story in this manner thus has the drastic consequence of questioning the version of Islam followed by the majority of Muslims in the modern world. Whether or not the reader accepts Galian's interpretation of the events following Muhammad's death (his research appears sound) this strand of the book provides a fascinating insight into Islamic history that we just don't see enough of in the West. Other unusual aspects of Islam are also discussed such as the Mahdi, the prophet who has been concealed within the world by Allah since Muhammad's death and who will be revealed in the End Days and Khezr, the Green Man of Islam.

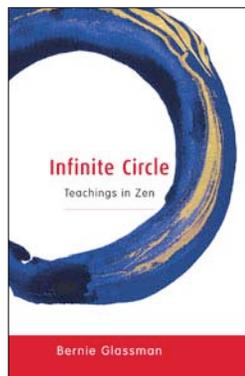
The final part of the book is the path of spiritual development and concerns the many facets the student of Sufism (Galian uses the word Murid) will need to address. Some readers will no doubt interpret Galian's portrayal of Sufism as somehow, 'Left



Hand Path.’ The reasons for this are special attention to esoteric knowledge, discussions of darkness and sex, and references toentheogens and Aleister Crowley. Such an interpretation probably misses the point of the Left Hand Path and almost certainly of Galian. The point is not to focus on these darker, ‘shadow’ elements as an end to themselves, but to acknowledge them alongside the traditional ‘light’ aspects, producing a more holistic spiritual development. This proves to be Galian’s greatest success, offering not some lofty, unachievable spirituality but one which reflects all of our humanity. Galian’s Murid is led away from overbearing gurus and masochistic regimes and encouraged instead to, “strive each day to have a good laugh, to do something silly, sing a song, and to feel the joy of life.”

Galian’s task is essentially one of rediscovering lost treasure. He rediscovers the Ahlul Bayt, he rediscovers the feminine at the heart of Islam, he rediscovers the Shadow and in doing so rediscovers what it is to be a real Sufi, Muslim, and Human.

**Infinite Circle: Teachings In Zen**, Bernie Glassman  
(Shambhala, 2002, 142pp, \$13.95)



Glassman is a long time Zen practitioner and social activist. He is the first dharma heir to Taizan Maezumi Roshi the influential founder of the Los Angeles Zen Center. Glassman holds a firm conviction that practicing Zen also predicates a social conscience combined with social activism. Putting his belief into tireless practice, he is the founder of the Greystone Mandala a collection of various community development and service organizations based in New York City. The successful Greystone Bakery provides numerous jobs as well as helping to fund other Mandala initiatives, such as restoration of low cost housing, a housing facility for people with AIDS, a day project providing for health and medical needs of people living with HIV and AIDS, and a garden project bringing community members together.

Glassman is also co-founder, with his wife Jishu Holmes, of the international Peacemaker Community and a spiritually based order for clowns, the Order of DisOrder.

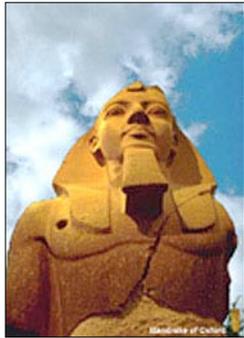
*Infinite Circle*, based on a series of talks, provides an articulation of Glassman's philosophy of engaged Buddhist practice. He tackles three classic Buddhist texts to bring a fleshed out vision of why he feels Bhuddhism requires action as well as contemplation.



He provides a detailed exegesis of the “Heart Sutra,” spending several pages discussing the meaning of the first sentence's first word *maha*. The second piece of material he discusses is the “Bodhisattva Precepts” using it to discuss the relative nature of the Dharma. To provide a balance between these two works, he gives an analysis of a lesser known work “The Identity of Relative and Absolute” a poem by Chinese Ch’an master Shih-t’ou Hsi-ch’ien. This latter work discusses enlightenment and action.

Though attempting to present some very difficult material in a rather slim volume, Glassman's book is still quite readable. Originally delivered as lectures, he manages to retain a conversational tone throughout most of the book. Ideally suited for readers who have some background knowledge of Zen Buddhism, much of the work is still accessible by those beginning their studies.

**Tankhem: Meditations on Seth Magick**, Mogg Morgan  
(Mandrake of Oxford, 184pp £10.99)



Ancient Egypt and the “Typhonian” deity Seth, how to find out more? Followers of later cults obliterating Seth’s monuments, demonising and neglecting his cult. A possible starting point in the quest for the “hidden god” is an examination of the life of Egyptian King Sety I (“He of Seth”) also known as Sethos.

When looking for an astral temple that included all of the ancient Egyptian gods and goddesses, the Temple of Sety I proved itself worthy of examination. Many secrets began to reveal themselves. The essence of the real philosophy of the Sethian and indeed what Satanism is, stems from the author’s astral wanderings in this temple.

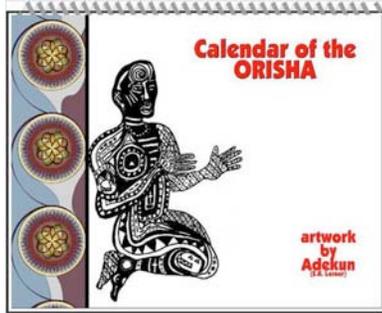
The temple is a real place and like any temple no part of its design is accidental. It is a record in stone and paint of the Egyptian mythos. It is also fits quite well with the Thelemic mythos and tells lots of interesting things about the ancient Seth cult - if you have the eye to see it.

Contents: Prolegomena to Egyptian magick; Setanism; Tankhem, Egyptian Magick and Tantra; Sexual Magick; Twenty Eight; North; The Crooked Wand

The author has published numerous articles, short stories and books, principally *Ayurveda: Medicine of the Gods*, *The English Mahatma* (a Tankhem novel) and as (“Katon Shual”) *Sexual Magick*.



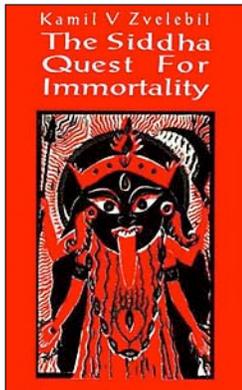
**Calendar of the Orisha**, Artwork by Adekun (E.K. Lerner)  
(Lulu Press, 2004, \$17.95)



Adekun's artwork has appeared several times in the pages of Ashé and his submissions are always warmly welcomed. As an artist, he possesses a unique vision within the realm of spiritual art. His images of the Orishas, Santerian deities, are powerful, evocative, at times disturbing and thoroughly modern. Each image demonstrates his deep connection to the spirit he depicts. The calendar may be ordered online through Lulu

Press: <http://www.lulu.com/orisha>

**Siddha Quest for Immortality: Sexual, alchemical and medical secrets of the Tamil Siddhas, the poets of the powers**, K Zvelebil - reissued  
(Mandrake of Oxford, 2003, 218pp, £13.99/\$25)



In South India there is a society where priests and lay people claim supernatural powers. Where a sophisticated medical system underlies a quest for physical longevity and psychic immortality. And where arcane and sexual rituals take place that are far removed from the Brahmanic tradition of the rest of India. That society is the Tamil Siddhas. In the Siddha Quest for Immortality world Tamil expert K Zvelebil offers a vivid picture of these people: their religious beliefs, their magical rites, their alchemical practices, their complex system of medicine, and their inspired tradition of poetry.

In the Poets of the Powers, Zvelebil introduced English speakers, for the first time, to the astonishing power of Siddha writing. The Siddha Quest for Immortality includes many newly translated examples of poetry that is deeply religious but not without humour. But physical longevity was also central to Siddha belief, and fascinating chapters on Siddha medicine describe routines by which one can maintain health, and tell how drugs are created from such varied ingredients as cowdung, human urine, honey, and milk.



K Zvelebil, (Professor Emeritus of the Universities of Chicago and Utrecht) is an ordained Buddhist and world-renowned expert on south Indian Languages and culture. He has written many books including the Lexicon of Tamil Literature. The Siddha Quest for Immortality makes available for the first time, secrets of tantrik magick and alchemy.

### **Throbbing Gristle for Beltaine**

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