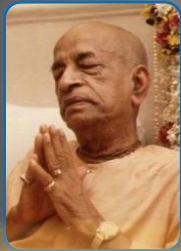


Freedom Newsletter



Dedicated to His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
Founder-Acarya of the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness

ISKCON Prison Ministry / March 2025

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Alachua, FL 32616

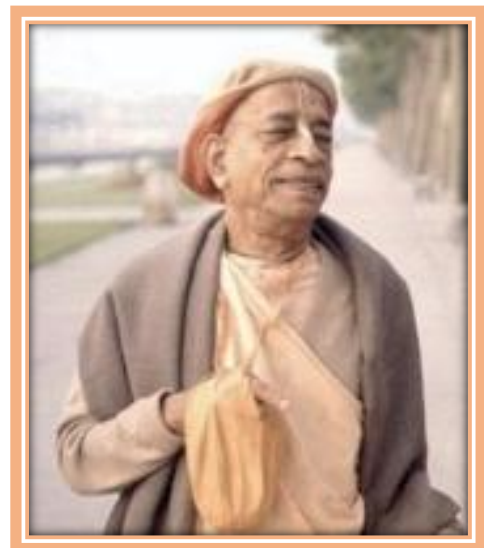
PRABHUPADA SPEAKS OUT

1972 PRABHUPADA INTERVIEW BY NEW YORK TIMES

*His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, Founder-Acarya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, speaks with Jon Nordheimer of **The New York Times** in a conversation recorded in September 1972 at New Vrindaban, the Society's farm community near Wheeling, West Virginia.*

Srila Prabhupada: When we speak of Kṛṣṇa, we mean God. Everyone has some vague idea of God, but no clear idea. Therefore God descends to show what He is. If we speculate on God, someone will think one thing and another person will think another. This is the result of speculation. But if God Himself comes and shows Himself as He is and speaks about Himself, that is perfect knowledge. This Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is spreading that message.

In *Bhagavad-gita*, God Himself is speaking about Himself: I am like this; My form is like this; My activities are like this; My address is this and that. If you like, you can come back to Me. There is no restriction—everyone can come to Me.” All this information is there in *Bhagavad-gita*, where God speaks about Himself and presents Himself as He is.



We have simply to take that information; then we can understand Him. And when we understand God. Krsna, we can go back to Him. It is a very simple thing. Krsna says.

janma karma ca me divyam
evam yo veti tattvatah
tyaktva deham punar janma
naiti mam eti so 'rjuna

“One who knows the transcendental nature of My appearance and activities does not, upon leaving the body, take his birth again in this material world, but attains My eternal abode. O Arjuna.” [*Bhagavad-gita* 4.9]

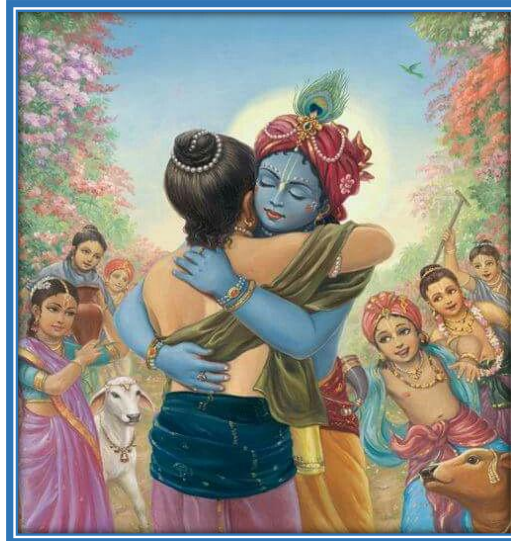
So God is there; that's a fact. Anyone can go back to Him and live an eternal life full of bliss and knowledge simply by knowing about it. When God Himself comes, all great *acaryas*, stalwart men, accept Him: “Yes, He is God.” If we simply understand God, we make a solution to all our problems.

Because we are part and parcel of God, we are qualitatively equal with Him. God is eternal, and we are eternal. God is blissful, and we are blissful. God is full of knowledge; we are also full of knowledge.

Unfortunately, we are hampered by this material body. Therefore our problem is how to get out of this material body and come to our spiritual body. The spiritual body is there, just as our real body is present underneath our

shirt and coat. I, you, and every one of us is a spiritual spark, part and parcel of God, and we are placed within gross body and a subtle body. When this particular gross body is finished, we are carried by the subtle body into another gross body. That is called transmigration of the soul. And when we finally set free from the subtle body also, we go back home, back to Godhead, It is that easy.

A human being should therefore endeavor to get out of the gross and subtle bodies, attain a spiritual body, and go back home. That should be the aim of human endeavor. Not that we should simply live like animals. Animals cannot get out of the gross and subtle bodies, because to extricate oneself one must know in fact what God is. An animal cannot know what God is, but a human being can. That is the opportunity afforded by this body. Nature gives us this human body just to understand Krsna, but if we simply use it for animal propensities, we will again go down to the animal kingdom. That is a form of punishment.



Mr. Nordheimer: What problems do you have in making your words, your instructions, reach the ears of everyone in the world?

Srila Prabhupada: We are not preaching our own words; we are preaching Krsna's words. Now it is up to you to make your choice. Krsna says to give up all other engagements and just surrender unto Him.

How? He says in *Bhagavad-gita* [9.34],

man-mana bhava mad-bhakto
mad-yaji mam namaskuru
mam evaisyasi satyam te
pratijane priyo 'si me

“Engage your mind always in thinking of Me and become My devotee. Offer your obeisances to Me and worship Me. Being completely absorbed in Me, surely you will come to Me.”

Suppose I am a member of a political party and am always thinking of Mr. Such-and-Such, my leader. I become a staunch follower of that leader. People are sacrificing their lives simply to follow a political leader, and for party superiority they are doing so many things—always thinking of the party's activities, always glorifying the party's principles. If all these activities are transferred to Krsna, they become good. Krsna says, “Think of Me, become my devotee, worship Me, and offer obeisances unto Me” If we perform these activities for Krsna, we become Krsna conscious. That is what we are teaching.

We advise that you keep doing what you are doing-but do it for Krsna. That is Krsna consciousness. It is not difficult. But if you want to love a dog and become a dog in your next life instead of loving God and becoming like God in the next life, that is your choice. The prison and the university are open to everyone, and by making your choice you make your future destiny. My disciples are worshiping God, and people criticize them, but when a man worships a dog he is not criticized. In this way society has progressed. So it is folly to be wise where ignorance is bliss.

Mr. Nordheimer: What about the future? Is it possible to bring more people into Krsna consciousness? To expand?

Srila Prabhupada: Of course, there are good men and bad men, and good men are taking to this movement, because it is a good movement. “Good” means not having illicit sex, not eating meat, not indulging in intoxication, and not indulging in gambling. If anyone observes these four principles, he is considered a good man, and if he does not observe them, he is a bad man.

So good men will take to this Krsna consciousness movement, and bad men will not.

We give distinct rules on how to become good, for if one does not become good, how can he understand God, who is all good? First we must become good men; then we can understand God. It's up to us to make the choice.

The future is open for everyone. There is no restriction; no one says, "This class of men shall be good, and this class of men shall be bad." Anyone can become good. If we educate a child nicely, he becomes good. but if we train him foolishly, he becomes a rascal. It is the duty of the government, the father, and the teachers to make everyone good. If the government is bad, the father is bad, and the teachers are bad, how can the child be good? Everywhere the government, the father, and the teachers are bad; therefore we are producing bad men, and there is no peace and prosperity.

Mr. Nordheimer: What about the men who surround you?

Srila Prabhupada: They're all good men.

Mr. Nordheimer: They are good men who were raised in a bad society.

Srila Prabhupada: They were raised in a bad society, but they have chosen to become good.

Mr. Nordheimer: Is that preordained, or is it by free choice?

Srila Prabhupada: Free choice. What is "preordained"? You are here of your free choice. If you like, you can sit down and talk with me, and if you don't like, you can go. That is your free choice. Free choice makes destiny: if I act in goodness, then my future is good, and if I act badly, my future is bad. That is destiny.

Man is the architect of his own destiny. In other words, our future destiny depends on our present action. This life is an opportunity to improve our next life, and if we behave like human beings, then in our next life we will go back home, back to Godhead. But if we behave like animals, then in our next life we will take animal bodies. That's all. All this is very nicely described in *Bhagavad-gita*.

The conclusion is that human beings are meant for understanding God, but if you waste your time understanding dog, that is your choice. If you try to understand dog instead of God, and if you become too attached to dog, then you will become a dog in your next life. But if you are attached to God, you become like God in your next life. The choice is yours.

Krsna says in *Bhagavad-gita* [4.11],

ye yatha mam prapadyante
tams tathaiva bhajamy aham
mama vartmanuvartante
manusyah partha sarvasah

"As living beings surrender unto Me, I reward them accordingly. Everyone follows My path in all respects, O Arjuna."

God is available. and we can associate with Him according to our choice. The ability to choose, or our conscience, is given to us in the human form so we can utilize it. All the ingredients are there for us to cross the ocean of birth and death. This human body is a very nice boat, and we have a very good navigator, the spiritual master. We also have a very favorable wind—the instructions of God. So we should take our chance and cross the ocean of birth and death. But if we don't take this opportunity and solve the problems of life, we are cutting our own throat. If you cut your own throat, who can save you? We can say, "Now here is an opportunity. Take it and be saved from birth, old age, disease, and death." but if you don't take advantage, what can we do?

Mr. Nordheimer: Why does all this exist? Why the challenge in the first place? Why maya?

Srila Prabhupada: *Maya* means illusion, darkness. If I tell you to come from the darkness into the light and if you don't come, that is your misfortune. *Maya* is there, and God is there. If you want to remain in *maya*, then how can you be saved? I can help you by saying, "Don't remain in darkness. Please come out into the light." But if you say, "No, I shall remain here," then how can I save you? You have your choice. God is there, and *maya* is there. If you take to *maya*, you remain in darkness. What can I do, and what can God do? That is your choice. 🌸



BOOK DISTRIBUTION STORIES!

The door of the Divine is always open; it is never too late to turn to God.

By Geeta Bhandari

Suzie, a vibrant 87-year-old who lives near Bhaktivedanta Manor (England), paused as I stopped her, sharing how much she loves the uplifting sound of kirtans.

She then told me that her grandchildren refuse to eat meat, though she isn't quite sure why. With a knowing look, she added, "I somehow feel you Hare Krishnas don't eat meat." I handed her *The Higher Taste*, explaining that not only does it contain delicious vegetarian recipes, but it also reveals how food influences the mind and consciousness, helping one rise to the mode of goodness.

Sensing her sincerity, I handed her the *Bhagavad Gita* and told her meeting us today is no coincidence...it's a sign for her to deepen her connection with God. She listened intently, radiating grace

and, with heartfelt gratitude, she thanked me for stopping her. Before leaving, she promised she would now definitely visit Bhaktivedanta Manor.



She may have lived near Bhaktivedanta Manor for years, but Srila Prabhupada has his own divine timing for bringing souls closer. Sometimes, even those living in proximity remain untouched until the perfect moment arrives.

Today was that moment for Suzie...the day Srila Prabhupada's mercy flowed into her life at the age of 87, connecting her to his movement through his transcendental books! It really is never too late! Srila Prabhupada can save us at any age and at any moment!...Whenever the time is right, his mercy finds us! 🌸



LIFE OF A PURE DEVOTEE

RAMANUJACHARYA (Appearance day on April 2nd)

When the religion of the Vedas became weakened due to the influence of less intelligent men who wrongly used the excuse of the ritualistic ceremonies of the Vedas to viciously slaughter animals, simply to satisfy their taste for meat —engaging in such violence, people factually became atheists, although professing to follow the Vedas. To stop that senseless killing, Lord Buddha (an incarnation of Lord Krishna) appeared and outwardly rejected the Vedas so that the scriptures would not be used as an excuse for killing the poor animals. Knowing the atheists were not inclined to worship God, Lord Buddha expounded a philosophy they could follow; He advocated the path of

ahimsa (nonviolence) and nirvana (the negation of reality as we know it). The atheists then accepted and worshiped Lord Buddha. In this way Lord Krishna not only tricked the atheists in stopping violence toward the animals, but also in worshipping Him, in the form of Lord Buddha.



Soon after, to reestablish the authority of the Vedas, Krishna ordered Lord Siva to appear as Shankaracharya and fight the Buddhist doctrine. Since the atheists were not ready to accept the worship of Supreme Lord yet, Shankaracharya gradually revived the authority of the Upanishads and other Vedic literature by *interpreting* the Vedas to draw a particular

conclusion, establishing the doctrine of non-dualism (*advaita-vedanta*), stating that all living entities were on an equal level with God. This philosophy of overpowered Buddhism and spread throughout India. But these teachings of Shankara were not wholly theistic, and thus a further unveiling of the ultimate reality was destined. That destiny was fulfilled through Shri Ramanujacharya.

Ramanuja was born in India during the year 1017 A.D. Upon the death of his father, Ramanuja became head of the household and decided to move to Kanchi, a holy city famed for its scholars and magnificent Temples. In Kanchi, there lived a scholar named Yadava Prakash, who was renowned for his scholarship in the doctrine of *advaita-vedanta*, nondualism. No one could surpass Yadava in his ability to explain Shankara's commentaries on Vedanta-sutra. Ramanuja enrolled in Yadava's school and engaged in the study of Sanskrit and Vedic literature. Although not at all convinced by the Shankarite conception, Ramanuja learned his lessons well and soon became one of Yadava's favorite students. Thinking Ramanuja to be a sincere follower of the conclusions of Shankara, Yadava showed Ramanuja special affection, but that affection did not last for long.

One day, another student came to Yadava for some clarification on a point from the morning discourse. Yadava proceeded to expound an interpretation which described the sublime qualities of the Godhead in an impersonal manner. On hearing the words of his teacher, the heart of Ramanuja, which was full of love for the Supreme Godhead, was saddened, and hot tears streamed down from his eyes. When Yadava inquired about Ramanuja's distress, Ramanuja replied, "O great and wise master, I have been sorely afflicted at heart to hear such an unbecoming explanation from a noble soul like you. How sinful it is of you to debase the Supreme, who is endowed with all gracious qualities and who is the source of all beautiful things in this world."

Yadava became so angry that he could hardly control himself. "Well then," he scorned, maybe you would like to give your own interpretation since you obviously think you know better than I!"

In a very gentle voice Ramanuja replied, "Revered sir, there is no need to give a low-minded interpretation to the verse when the real meaning is direct and glorious."

"Then let us hear this meaning of yours which is so glorious!" said Yadava. Ramanuja then stood and with

great humility recited the meaning of the verse. "The two eyes of the Supreme are as lovely as two lotuses that are blossomed by the rays of the sun."

"I see," said Yadava. "You speak as though there actually was such a 'Supreme Person.' That is due to your childish ignorance. You have not learned your lessons properly. You should always remember that the



Supreme is without form, without name, and without attributes. That is the teaching of the great Shankara. In the future you should not voice your foolish sentiments!" The words of Yadava were painful to Ramanuja's ears, but out of respect for his teacher he remained silent.

A few days later, Yadava said that Brahman was intelligence, truth, and the infinite. Hearing this explanation, Ramanuja politely added, "Brahman is endowed with the qualities of intelligence, truth, and the infinite. This means that He is not covered by ignorance as are ordinary living entities, He is never untruthful, and His energies are unlimited, not limited. The Supreme Brahman is the reservoir of all good qualities, yet He is superior to those qualities, as the sun globe is superior to sunlight."

The agitation which Yadava felt within his mind made his voice tremble. "You, young fool!" he shouted. "Your conclusions do not agree with those of Shankara or any of the previous masters! If you are going to persist with this useless talk about a personal God, why come here at all, simply to waste my time? Why don't you start your own school and teach whatever you like? Now, get out of my classroom immediately!"

Shortly thereafter, Ramanuja opened a small school at his home, and in no time many people began to come to him to hear his devotional discourses. Ramanuja's lectures were wholly theistic. He rejected the concept that the jiva, a living entity, could be equal to the Supreme Brahman or become God as postulated by Shankara. The living entity, Ramanuja taught, is a particle of Godhead, and as such, his position is to serve the complete whole. He said that, as the hand is part of the body and thus a servant of the body, similarly the living entity is part of the Supreme and thus his constitutional position is to serve the Supreme.

Ramanuja's philosophy became known as vishishtadvaita or qualified non-dualism. Accordingly, the living entities are believed to be *qualitatively* one with the Supreme and at the same time *quantitatively*

different. Ramanuja's assertion was that the quantitative difference means that the fragmentary parts of the Supreme are dependent on the Supreme but they cannot become the Supreme.

The philosophy of Shankara stated that everything is Brahman and Brahman itself is absolutely homogeneous, undifferentiated, and without personality; individuality arose only due to illusion or maya. But this concept was staunchly opposed by Ramanuja. His philosophy stated that there can never be knowledge of an unqualified object; knowledge necessarily points to an object as characterized in some way. Ramanuja never admitted to an attributeless, undifferentiated Brahman, but rather a Brahman which is an attribute of a greater reality: Godhead Himself. He reasoned that as the living entities are individual personalities, so too is the Supreme also a personality—the Supreme Personality.

Ramanuja further reasoned that if illusion could cover the identity of the Supreme, then illusion was greater than Godhead. Therefore he asserted that we are eternally individual personalities and the Supreme is infinite, eternally the Supreme Personality, but due to our finite nature we are sometimes subject to illusion.

Ramanuja also accepted the theory of transformation rejected by Shankara. According to Shankara the material world is false; it has no existence.

Ramanuja, on the other hand, said that the material world is the energy of Godhead, and the subjective reality does not undergo any change of substance in the matter of material manifestation in the same way that a singer who creates a song out of his own energy is not diminished due to his creation; rather, he becomes more glorious.

Neither the material world nor the living entities are conceived of as being independent of the Supreme Personality in the system of *vishishtadwaita* philosophy. The living entities are a different manifestation of the Supreme due to their being endowed with free will, whereas the material energy is manifested directly under the will of the Supreme. The free will of the living entity is an all-important factor, since that free will is considered to be the basic



principle of reciprocal relations between Godhead and the living entity.

Ramanuja presented the living entities' relationship with Godhead as being one of eternal service. According to Ramanuja, when the living entities are freed from the illusions produced by the material energy by the method of devotional service, love of God naturally develops, and the soul enters the spiritual sky. Once having reached the spiritual world, the soul engages in eternal service to the Supreme Person. This sublime message was daily imparted by Ramanuja to his listeners.

Seeing the growing popularity of Ramanuja and the influence which he had on the people of Kanchi, the proud and arrogant Yadava Prakash became restless. Gathering his faithful students by his side, Yadava said, "This impudent Ramanuja is a heretic! He is a nuisance to society and a threat to our doctrines of non-dualism. I can see no other solution to the problem than to kill this rascal! What do you say?" Yadava's disciples were in complete agreement with their teacher since they too were envious of Ramanuja. Thus they devised a plan to kill him.

On the plea of worshipping the sacred river Ganges, Yadava and his disciples made arrangements for a pilgrimage to Banaras and asked Ramanuja if he would like to join them. Unsuspecting of their treacherous plan, Ramanuja accepted the invitation. As the group was about to depart, Ramanuja requested his cousin Govinda

to accompany him. On the fourth day of their journey, Govinda was taken into confidence by some of Yadava's younger students who disclosed the plan to kill Ramanuja. Shocked at the evil intentions of Yadava and his followers, Govinda took Ramanuja to a secluded place in the forest and informed him of the danger. Govinda requested Ramanuja to flee into the forest immediately before it was too late.

Govinda then returned to the camp and told the others that while he and Ramanuja were looking for wild berries in the forest, a tiger had pounced upon Ramanuja and dragged his helpless body away. Outwardly Yadava and his disciples displayed symptoms of sorrow, but inwardly their hearts leaped with joy. Ramanuja was now gone from their lives forever. Or so they thought.

Ramanuja resumed his normal life at Kanchi and did not reveal to anyone that his life had been in danger. Several months passed until one day, Yadava and his disciples finally returned to Kanchi after completing their pilgrimage. They were staggered at the sight of Ramanuja alive and conducting his school as usual. Thinking that their plan might have been discovered, they became fearful and abandoned any further plans to kill Ramanuja.

The fame of Ramanuja continued to spread far and wide. One day, as Ramanuja sat in the solitude of his study, a venerable saint named Yamunacharya came to his door for alms. Extending his full courtesy, Ramanuja welcomed the saint into his home. Ramanuja learned that Yamuna was from Shri Rangam, the famous Temple of Vishnu. In the course of their discussion, Ramanuja soon realized that Yamunacharya was a qualified spiritual master of the science of devotion. Overwhelmed with ecstasy and jubilation, Ramanuja fell at his feet and asked to be accepted as his disciple.

Yamuna instantly raised Ramanuja up from the floor, and embracing him with deep love, said, "My child, I am blessed today by seeing your devotion to God. May you live a long and fruitful life always being intent in the service of Narayana, the Personality of Godhead." Ramanuja then circumambulated his guru to invoke auspiciousness, and Yamuna left for Shri Rangam. Now more than ever, Ramanuja preached the doctrine of devotion with strength and conviction. So convincing was Ramanuja in his presentation that even Yadava Prakash and his followers eventually surrendered and became his disciples.

Then one day, a messenger came from Shri Rangam and informed Ramanuja that his guru was ill and on the verge of death. Ramanuja immediately departed for Shri Rangam, but was not able to reach there in time. Shortly before Ramanuja arrived, Yamuna left his body and entered the blissful realm of Vaikuntha. Ramanuja reached the place where his guru was lying, surrounded by a group of his disciples.

Momentarily, everyone's attention focused on Ramanuja as he entered the room and came to sit by the side of his guru. Tears of love filled his eyes and he wept, his heart feeling great separation from his master. The left hand of Yamuna was poised in the yoga posture for peace, with three fingers extended and the thumb and forefinger joined together at the tips. His

right hand, however, was at his side but clenched into a fist. All the disciples were struck with wonder about the position of their guru's right hand. And none of them could understand the meaning.

Ramanuja broke the silence by declaring, "Our guru, the revered Yamunacharya, has three desires that he wishes to be fulfilled. I will protect the people in general who are deluded by impersonalism by

bestowing upon them the nectar of surrender at the lotus feet of Narayana."

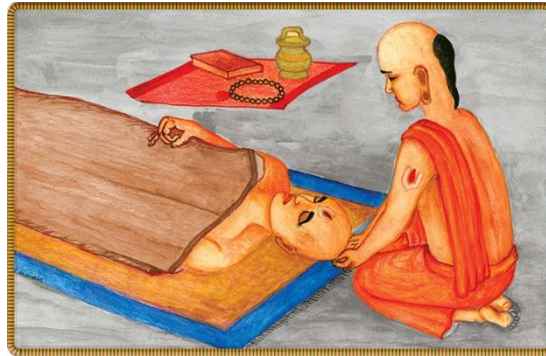
As Ramanuja spoke, one of the fingers on Yamuna's right hand extended outward. Then Ramanuja said, "For the well-being of the people of the world, I will prepare a commentary on the Vedanta-sutra that will establish the Supreme Person as the ultimate reality."

At this, a second finger extended, and Ramanuja continued speaking. "And in order to honor Parashara Muni, who in ancient times established the relation between jīvas, living entities, and Ishvara -the Supreme Person, I shall name one of my disciples who is greatly learned and devoted after him."

Ramanuja then became silent and the third finger on the right hand of Yamuna extended. Everyone present was amazed to see this miracle, and from that day on they all accepted Ramanuja as their leader and guide. Ramanuja continued to live at Shri Rangam for the remainder of his life and in due course all three vows were fulfilled by him.

Although he lived for many years as a successful householder, Ramanuja eventually took up the renounced order of life, sannyasa and dressed in saffron cloth, carrying the renunciate's three-sectioned staff, which signified service to God by body, mind, and words. So powerful was Ramanuja that the philosophers of non-dualism soon found it difficult to maintain their position in any kingdom. Ramanuja established the tenets of devotion so firmly that no one could oppose him. Many great and learned scholars came to hear him speak and became his disciples.

Feeling oppressed by the growing popularity of devotion, a certain group of impersonalists went to see the Chola king, Krimikantha, at Kanchi. Bowing humbly before the king, who was himself an impersonalist, they asked him to do something to stop Ramanuja. After some discussion it was decided that the king would invite Ramanuja to take part in a philosophical debate at the palace. Thus the king's messengers were sent to Shri Rangam to fetch



Ramanuja. The king had it in mind to convert Ramanuja by force if necessary. Once Ramanuja had been indoctrinated, he thought, then everyone in his kingdom would return to the fold of Shankara.

After meeting with the king's messengers at Shri Rangam, Ramanuja prepared to go to Kanchi. However Kuresh, a wise disciple of Ramanuja, did not trust the intentions of the king and pleaded with his guru to allow him to go in his place. Kuresh insisted, and Ramanuja agreed. Kuresh then dressed in the saffron robes of his guru and appeared before the messengers with staff in hand. Thinking Kuresh to be Ramanuja they started for Kanchi.

When Kuresh reached the palace, King Krimikantha greeted him with respect, thinking him to be Ramanuja. But later, when Kuresh refused to be intimidated by the behavior of the king, Krimikantha, in a mad rage, ordered his soldiers to arrest Kuresh and burn his eyes out. The king's men took Kuresh to a prison, and after blinding him and burning his eyes, released him in the forest. During the entire horrifying experience Kuresh never once protested. He found strength within, knowing that his guru was safe.

With the help of some people from Kanchi who were appalled by the action of the king, Kuresh was able to rejoin his guru at Shri Rangam. Within a matter of days after committing that grave offense against Kuresh, King Krimikantha was stricken with an incurable disease and died a miserable death.

At Shri Rangam Ramanuja took Kuresh before the Deity of Narayana, and with fervent prayers asked the Deity to restore his sight. "Oh master of the universe, You are the protector and well-wisher of Your Devotees. Kindly be merciful and renew the eyes of Kuresh, who, without protest, has made this supreme sacrifice." At that very moment Kuresh felt a gentle breeze blow across his brow and he immediately regained his sight.

Ramanuja continued living at Shri Rangam, serving the Deity of Narayana and imparting enlightenment to whoever came to him until he was 120 years old. One day while worshipping the Deity, he prayed, "Dear God, whatever I could do to preserve the essence of the Vedas, to uplift the fallen souls, and to establish the shelter of Your lotus feet as the supreme goal in life, I have done. Now my body has grown tired after many

years in this world. Kindly allow me to depart from this mortal world and enter Your supreme abode."

With this prayer Ramanuja returned to the assembly of his disciples and announced his desire to depart from this world. Thrown into an ocean of grief, the disciples clasped the feet of their guru and petitioned him to remain with them. "It is unbearable for us to conceive of the disappearance of your divine form, which is the

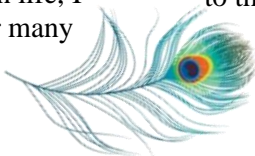
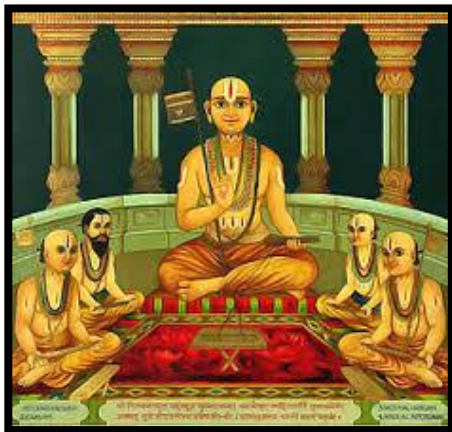
supreme purifier, the abode of all that is good, the destroyer of all afflictions, and the fountain of unlimited joy. Out of pity for your children, please stay with us for some time longer."

Ramanuja remained on Earth for three more days to appease their afflicted hearts. Ramanuja spoke his last instructions to those who were most near and dear to him: "Always remain in the company of and serve those souls devoted to Godhead just

as you would serve your own spiritual preceptor. Have faith in the teachings of the Vedas and in the words of the great saints. Never become the slave of your senses: always strive to conquer the three great enemies of self-realization: lust, anger, and greed. Worship Narayana and take pleasure in uttering the Holy Names of God as your only refuge. Sincerely serve the Devotees of Godhead: by service to the great Devotees, the highest service is done and one quickly gains the supreme mercy. Remembering these things you should live happily in this world for the attainment of the next." With these departing words, Ramanuja, his mind fixed in spiritual trance, relinquished his mortal body and entered the realm of Vaikuntha (the spiritual world).

Ramanuja was indeed a great theologian whose life and teachings have had a lasting influence on the development of theistic thought in India. Ramanuja's introduction of the Godhead as the Absolute Entity with divine characteristics, and his having pioneered the dawning of devotion to Godhead, opened the door for future theistic reformers who would in due course fully reveal the highest potential of the soul in a loving relationship with God and His eternal servants.

"I take refuge at the feet of Shri Ramanuja, our venerable master, who, during the dark night of the impersonal conception of divinity, carried the torchlight of knowledge and thus illuminated the path of devotion to the Personality of Godhead." ❁



Excerpts from inmates' letters

Old & New

I've been a devotee of Kṛṣṇa for 11 months. I chant 16 + rounds daily and gave up meat, gambling, and intoxicants of all sorts. I used to be a miserable nasty dog of a person but since I found Kṛṣṇa and gave my life over to Him, I have truly found peace and happiness and freedom on the inside! Hare Kṛṣṇa. I thank His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada for bringing the loving knowledge of our Lord Kṛṣṇa to the USA. Hare Kṛṣṇa. I can't get enough to read or listen to about Kṛṣṇa. I'm in prison in West Virginia and I still have 5 more years till going in front of the parole board, but now that I've found Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Godhead, it does not matter about the chains on the body because I've true loving freedom on the inside with my soul.

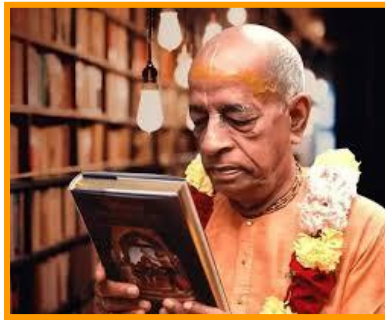
Back before I found Kṛṣṇa, I was always miserable and could not get enough of material desires, especially money, sex, and lust. I thought the world revolved around me! I didn't care whom I had to step on or hurt to get more false happiness! Now I have found the true meaning of love and happiness and freedom in chanting and loving Kṛṣṇa first and most, and every living creature! I've had so much terribly bad karma in my past. I just hope Kṛṣṇa can forgive my past! Since I found Kṛṣṇa, I've gotten services started here; some devotees get together in the chapel every Friday 9:00 to 11:30 AM for fellowship. Is there any way you could help me with some devotional music? We have a stereo in the chapel and a personal Walkman and PlayStation in our cells. If I could get books and CDs donated to the chapel library, that would be such a big help for us devotees here at Northern C.F. Hare Kṛṣṇa.

I just thank my lucky star for finding Kṛṣṇa and every day I learn more and more about the real reason I was created, the true meaning of life! Hare Kṛṣṇa.

Bhakta Samuel Reifinger —Moundsville, West Virginia

As I read more about the pastimes of Lord Kṛṣṇa and Lord Caitanya, I realize what a blessing it is to be associated with Vaisnavas and I'm grateful that you and Parijata are helping me to become one. It brings me great comfort knowing that chanting the maha-mantra

and being Kṛṣṇa conscious purifies me from my past sins and their sinful reactions. The Caitanya-caritāmṛta is such transcendental nectar. Every night after all is silent, I lose myself in Lord Caitanya's and His devotee's pastimes. The TV right outside my cell is on 12 hours a day and is one of Maya's great (in an extreme way) distractions so now I try to reverse my schedule as much as possible and sleep during the hours that it's on and be awake and up when all are asleep.



Sometimes I lose myself so much in such Kṛṣṇa conscious bliss that I find myself starting at all my transcendental pictures for a good amount of time. I've been almost perfect this month chanting 16 rounds as I find it so much more conducive to chanting when all is still and quiet. Sometimes it feels like I go into a time warp and it feels like I've only been chanting for a short amount of time but I know I've chanted many rounds. What also happens when I finish my chanting is I feel cleansed as if I just took a shower but I'm no longer wet. It's an interesting physical sensation that occurs. I've also followed your guidance, Mataji, and offered up whatever it was (is) I am feeling—whether it's frustration or fear or restlessness or doubt—but I also just surrender in joy and happiness at the Lord's lotus feet and tell Him of my gratitude for His comfort and mercy. And Mataji, this is what I experience the most: the Lord's comfort.

I had so much when I was free. I had a successful business in Las Vegas. I bought a brand-new house and watched it get built from its foundation. I was a pillar of my community, knew all my neighbors and all in my congregation—and the most difficult of all—I was just 2 days away from getting married to my dream girl when the FBI showed up and got me for something I thought I left behind me. ~~was repenting for~~. Now, after studying the Bhagavad-gita for the last 2 years, I'm coming to an understanding of why it all happened but that doesn't cancel out the regret which is like a tidal wave. I start becoming swept away by it and I call out "Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa" and there He is—right there on the tip of my tongue, ready to comfort me and assuage my regret."

Bhakta Richard C. —San Bernardine, Californi

Calendar

MARCH 2025

22 Mar 2025 - Appearance Day of Sri Srivasa Pandita
26 Mar 2025 - **Papamochani Ekadasi**
26 Mar 2025 - Disappearance Day of Sri Govinda Ghosh

APRIL 2025

02 April 2025 - Appearance Day of Sri Ramanujacharya
06 April 2025 - **Appearance of Lord Ramacandra**
08 April 2025 - **Kamada Ekadasi**
12 April 2025 - Appearance Day of Sri Vamsivadananda Thakura
12 April 2025 - Appearance Day of Sri Syamananda Prabhu
20 April 2025 - Disappearance Day of Sri Abhirama Thakura
23 April 2025 - Disappearance Day of Srila Vrndavana Dasa Thakura
24 April 2025 - **Varuthini Ekadasi**
27 April 2025 - Appearance Day of Sri Gadadhara Pandita

MAY 2025

06 May 2025 - Appearance Day of Srimati Sita Devi (consort of Lord Rama)
06 May 2025 - Disappearance Day of Sri Madhu Pandita
06 May 2025 - Appearance Day of Srimati Jahnava Devi (consort of Lord Nityananda)
08 May 2025 - **Mohini Ekadasi**
10 May 2025 - Disappearance Day of Sri Jayananda Prabhu
11 May 2025 - **Appearance of Lord Narasimhadeva**
12 May 2025 - Appearance Day of Sri Sri Radha-Ramana Devji
12 May 2025 - Appearance Day of Sri Madhavendra Puri
12 May 2025 - Appearance Day of Sri Srinivasa Acharya
12 May 2025 - Disappearance Day of Sri Paramesvari Dasa Thakura
17 May 2025 - Disappearance Day of Sri Ramananda Raya
23 May 2025 - **Apara Ekadasi**
24 May 2025 - Appearance Day of Srila Vrndavana Dasa Thakura



WHAT IS A LUNAR CALENDAR?

In the calendar used by the Hare Krsna devotees, the month begins the day after the moon becomes full. As the moon wanes, the days of the month are numbered "first," "second," "third," and so on, until the fifteenth day, when the moon is completely dark. This is the day of the new moon.

These fifteen days of the waning moon are called the "dark fortnight."

Now the moon starts waxing, and again, as the moon grows, the days are numbered "first," "second," "third," and so on. On the fifteenth day the moon is full again. These fifteen days of the waxing moon are called the "bright fortnight." The full moon marks the end of the month.

The eleventh day after the full moon and the eleventh day after the new moon are called Ekadasi. Hare Krsna devotees observe these as special days for increased remembrance of Krsna.

Twelve lunar months make a lunar year. Since a lunar month lasts 29.5 days, a lunar year lasts 12 times that long, or 354 days.

But the solar year (the time it takes for the sun to complete one full orbit) lasts 11 days longer—roughly 365.25 days. So by the solar calendar (like the ordinary one found in a date book), the lunar year will begin 11 days earlier every year. The seasons change in pace with the movements of the sun. The lunar calendar, therefore, is out of synch with the changing of the seasons.

To synchronize the lunar and solar years, the Vedic system therefore adds an extra month about every third year. This keeps the calendar and seasons in tune.

