

Bhāgavatam Rasamālayam

The Abode of Supreme Nectar

Meditations & Reflections from the lectures of His Holiness Bhakti Charu Swami

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Iskcon - Srila Prabhupada's Brilliance

What does ISKCON stand for? The International Society for Krishna Consciousness. The general understanding is that ISKCON represents devotion towards Krishna, isn't it? Now, what is the basis of ISKCON's purpose and conviction? The basis is the Vedas. It is not an organization that has merely been established by an individual's personal ideology or philosophy. Nowadays, we see many spiritual institutions are also founded on such kind of personal ideological foundations but ISKCON is not like that, as it is founded on Vedic understanding. What do you mean by Vedas? This Sanskrit word - Veda, literally means knowledge. Every Sanskrit term originates from specific roots. For example, the term Veda, comes from "vid" which means "to know." Therefore, Veda means that which has been known or in simple words - knowledge. This knowledge, however, is not derived from anyone's speculative, innate sense; or knowledge based on sense or intellectual perception. It comes from the spiritual world. Beyond this material nature is another reality and that is the spiritual reality. This is the world of matter and beyond this world of matter, there is the world of spirit, or spiritual reality. But how do we conclude that or how can we perceive that?



This is a world of matter and it is by nature, inert. For example, this is why we say "dead matter." Everything over here is made of matter. This microphone, table, floor, building - everything. All are made of matter and they are inert. But you and I? Although, our bodies are made of matter; we are conscious and alive. What makes our bodies conscious? It is the presence of the soul, that does. And as soon as the soul leaves the body, what happens? The body is dead.

A simple consideration: This body, made up of dead matter dies. Matter is dead and hence, all the bodies are dead anyway. These dead bodies become alive because of the presence of the soul. Now if we want the information about the soul, we come to know that the soul comes from another reality - the spiritual world. The soul is not a product of some material combination. It is beyond matter. It makes matter function in a non-material way. This knowledge about the soul and the spiritual reality is actually given at the time of creation by the Lord Himself to the first living entity in this material nature, Lord Brahma. Brahma received this knowledge from the Supreme Personality of Godhead and imparted it to his sons or disciples. That knowledge is called the Vedas.

The Vedas are all *paurusheya*, meaning that this vedic knowledge has not originated from any ordinary living being. It is coming from The Supreme Personality of Godhead Himself, from the spiritual sky. Therefore, when we approach the Vedas in a proper way, this understanding becomes very clear. All kinds of knowledge are there in the Vedas and have been divided into three sections or branches: Karma-kanda or relating to actions and reactions; Jnana-kanda relating to knowledge itself; and finally, a section relating to surrender to the Lord and developing a loving relationship with Him. This aspect gradually evolves from Karma-kanda to Jnana-kanda and finally, to Bhakti: devotion to the Lord.

The Karma-kanda describes how to enjoy or how to live happily in this material nature. Everybody wants to be happy but what is the definition of happiness? Happiness is the fulfilment of desire. When we desire something and the desire is fulfilled, we feel that we are happy.

Hence, Vedas give a prescription on how to fulfil different desires. The Vedas, therefore, have been compared to the desire tree. Trees generally give flowers and fruits, but there is a kind of tree that can fulfil your desires. The Vedas can be compared to such a tree because all desires can be fulfilled by approaching the Vedas and acting according to Vedic understanding. These different branches have analysed or substantiated six different branches of philosophy.

One branch is called Purva Mimamsa or preliminary conclusion. It deals with people, who want to enjoy and describes how to enjoy. It leads to karmic reaction - "as you sow so shall you reap" - as you act, accordingly you shall get the result. In other words: to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Therefore, if you act in a wrong way, you will be punished and if you act in a right way, you will be rewarded. Those who act properly, say for example, the law abiding citizens - they enjoy their life but those who break the law, end up in prison. Hence, the Vedas state that one must act in a way that one is able to fulfil the desires and enjoy. The Karma-kanda section entails what is the right action that will generate piety or "punya;" and the wrong action that will generate sin or "paapa." Sin leads to suffering and punya leads to enjoyment. Thus, that is the first impact of what is known as Purva mimamsa or Karma mimamsa: the conclusion of karmic reaction. And we can understand using our common sense that some people enjoy and some suffer. For example, some are born in the house of millionaires and some in the house of paupers. Is it an accidental phenomenon? No, there is the karmic reaction.

But the ultimate outcome of everything, despite all enjoyment is that one eventually realizes that there is suffering. I want to enjoy and I do not want to suffer. I am trying in so many ways to enjoy but uninvited sufferings come along, but why?

This actually takes us to the Jnana-kanda section, the knowledge section. Evoking the question: why I am suffering? This is dealt with a branch of philosophy that is known as Nyaya or logic. And, what is the conclusion? This material nature is a place of suffering and this body is a wonderful instrument to receive that. In a world that is meant for suffering and in a body that is meant to receive pain, where is the question for enjoyment? Therefore, what we are constantly trying to do is avoid that suffering condition.

Ignorance Is Not Bliss But Distress

So when we are successful in avoiding that suffering condition, we consider that as our happiness and when we are unable to avoid that suffering condition, we feel that we are actually suffering. Do you want to see how wonderful this body is? I will just give you an example. Take any part of your body, no matter how insignificant, say your little finger. Now consider in how many ways you can give pain to this little finger. There are unlimited ways in which you can give pain. Take a knife and cut it. Take a stone and smash it. There are so many ways in which you can inflict pain on this little finger. Now you can consider, in how many ways can you give pleasure to this little finger? Can you find some ways? Now, that actually applies to every single part of our bodies. You can even consider the tip of your tongue, the tip of your nose etc. There are so many ways, you can inflict pain on different parts of the body; but close to none, when you think of giving pleasure to the same.

Therefore, the conclusion is simple: This body is actually an instrument for receiving pain and as I was saying, what are we constantly trying to do - avoid painful situation. We see that there is possibility of getting hurt, so we avoid that situation using our intelligence. But the reality is that we are in a world which is meant for suffering - dukhalayam. In Sanskrit, this material nature has been described by Krishna as dukhalayam. "Dukha" means suffering, sorrow or misery and "alayam" refers to abode, house or place. Therefore, a place of suffering. This material world is in reality, a place of suffering and ashshwatam - if we think we are enjoying, it is only temporary and our enjoyment will not last for very long.

This takes us to the next branch of philosophy which is called Vaisheshika. Vaisheshika leads to understanding this perceivable reality. Perceivable nature is a combination of innumerable atoms and molecules. What appears to be something is only a combination of atoms and molecules. I am sure it's quite easy to understand. If you consider this microphone, ultimately we find it is a combination of different atoms and molecules. Everything exists in combination or in one of the five states: solid, liquid, aerial, fiery and ethereal.

Another branch of philosophy is called Sankhya - an analytical study. Analysis leads to the conclusion that there are five elements (earth, water, fire, air and ether) and five senses (eyes, nose, ears, tongue and touch). The senses interact with different elements and different objects of the senses are generated. For example, the ears interact with ether and sound is produced. Skin interacts with air and touch is produced. Eyes interact with fire and form is produced. Tongue interacts with water and taste is produced. Nose interacts with earth and smell is produced. In this way, the elements of this material nature with five senses give rise to five objects of the senses: sound, touch, form, taste and smell. Then there are five working senses, such as speech, hands, legs, belly, anus and genitals. Therefore, we learn that there are five elements, five senses, five objects of the senses and five working senses. Then there are three subtle elements, namely, mind, intelligence and false ego.

These are also material elements. In this way, these twenty four considerations are the ingredients for the material nature called maha-tattva. However, it is also known that these considerations are objective. But the objects cannot exist without the subject. "I am, therefore, this world is." This "I" can be found in all of these twenty four considerations. The entire material nature has been analysed by these twenty four considerations but the "I" is beyond that. This is how we are transcending material nature and coming to the spiritual reality. This "I" is minute and like everything else, even anything that is minute has a source. That source is the Supreme soul or the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This is how through this analytical study, one can transcend the material nature and come to spiritual reality, to recognize the existence of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

This takes us to the next branch of philosophy called yoga. Yoga means connection or link. The souls are multiple and minute and they are parts and parcels of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. How can this part become connected to the whole? It is obvious that the soul in this material nature has become disconnected from the whole. The connection is lost but how does one reconnect? This is dealt with in this fifth branch of philosophy - yoga or ashtanga yoga. This ashtanga yoga entails eight limbs or levels, starting from external purification to internal purification, as the body is a mere vehicle to reach the destination.

Awakening One's Dormant Love for Krishna

Then comes control over the breathing process, followed by withdrawal of the senses from its objects. Followed by meditation or projection of consciousness onto the Lord in the heart and finally, when you have perception of the Supreme Personality of Godhead that is called samadhi or trance. At that stage, when the living entity perceives the Supreme Personality of Godhead, he ultimately surrenders and that surrender actually is the beginning of the development of a loving relationship with the Lord. This is also the final conclusion of the Vedas and is known as Uttara mimamsa, meaning final conclusion. It begins from the preliminary conclusion coming to the final conclusion. Like, starting from Purva mimamsa - the preliminary instructions on how you can enjoy in this material world; to ultimately, the final conclusion that would lead you to developing a loving relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The means by which this relationship can be developed is love. Therefore, if we want to develop a relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead, then all we have to do is offer our love, our hearts.

Thus, coming back to our main point: What does ISKCON stand for? ISKCON is giving us the way to develop our love for the Supreme Personality of Godhead, which is the ultimate conclusion of the Vedas. However, this opportunity was not available to everyone earlier. But the Lord appearing as Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu gave us this process of developing our loving relationship, which is the ultimate conclusion of all spiritual understanding. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu appeared five hundred years ago and predicted that though He had distributed this knowledge all throughout India; this knowledge will still be spread all over the world, in every town and village. In order to fulfill His prediction, He sent a very special devotee and that is His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Srila Prabhupada ki jaya!

At the age of seventy, Srila Prabhupada came to America without any resources - no money, no patronage. He didn't even know where he was going to stay. He came to America without any prior arrangement, simply depending upon Krishna. He only had forty Rupees (Indian currency). That forty Rupees was also of no use as he couldn't get it exchanged in America.

In that condition, he comes and spreads this movement all over the world. He achieved all this in ten years and the arrangement that he made is making this movement grow in every town and village. Could anyone imagine that Krishna conscious movement will establish itself in America, but today we see that even in an obscure place like Dallas; Krishna-consciousness is favourably accepted. For many of you, who have an Indian background - you left India and came to America and then, you became a devotee of Krishna here.

This is a wonderful arrangement that Srila Prabhupada has made in the form of ISKCON. He has created inconceivable good fortune for all of us. What is the immediate benefit of accepting Krishna consciousness? The immediate benefit is immortality, no old age.

Immortality is actually a very simple conclusion: Are you this body or spirit soul? Does the soul die? You are the spirit soul and it does not die.

See, everybody is trying to achieve immortality. Then haven't you already been immortal? We may not have perceived it properly, but that is the fact. These are initial benefits and so what to speak of other benefits. We can go on and on until we get to the ultimate point of our loving relationship with Krishna in the spiritual world.

Thank you all very much.

All glories to Srila Prabhupada!

Therefore, if we want to develop a relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead, then all we have to do is offer our love, our hearts. ISKCON is giving us the way to develop our love for the Supreme Personality of Godhead.



Inquiries of the soul

Guest : Why is it sometimes difficult to understand the Vedas/Vedic Wisdom?

HH BCS: Thank you. You see, Vedic wisdom is so profound and meaningful that whoever approaches it, sees how practical and real it is. Unfortunately, people in today's world are not really opening themselves up to it. They are caught up in some sort of misconception that is created by today's education system and so forth. That is the unfortunate thing. Vedas are not really rejecting anything. You want to enjoy, go ahead. Why just a CEO, become ruler of the entire earth planet. These are the possibilities that are being offered and they are real. Now it is up to all of us those who have been exposed to the knowledge, to distribute this knowledge.

Guest : I have one question from the sixth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. What is the conclusion of this?

HH BCS: Srila Prabhupada put it this way: These different branches of philosophy are different rungs of the ladder. You know by itself, those philosophies are not the conclusion. They are just the means to come to the ultimate point which is devotional service. So if we approach the different branches of philosophy in a proper way, then we will end up in Krishna-consciousness because that is the goal. The trouble is that even those who are pursuing these branches of philosophy, are accepting this philosophy as the end. As a result, they end up at the wrong conclusion.

