
KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS – A REAL SCIENCE.

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Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this article are merely the product of a preliminary study into the teachings of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. They are presented in the hope that it will serve as a discussion paper in reconciling the tenets of faith with the principles of other knowledge gathering faculties such as science and philosophy.

Background

If one were so inclined as to slot the teachings of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada into the vast spectrum of the philosophies of the world, His rightful place would be in revealing the prerequisite for the philosophical comprehension of the timeless wisdoms of all scriptures. This prerequisite, He insists, is the devotional service (Bhakti Yoga) to the peerless Supreme Personality of Godhead. He corroborates this revelation by reference to the philosophies of

the Bhagavad-Gita (a timeless philosophical classic that literally translates to “The Song of God”), and commentaries on it by Lord Caitanya Mahaprabu (a saintly philosopher of the 16th century).

History will forever recognize Srila Prabhupada's substantial contribution to our eternal quest for spiritual enlightenment.

Introduction

“Krishna consciousness is not a bluff. It is a real science, real authority. One simply has to understand it. That is all”. These were the words of one of the most authoritative sources on the Vedas in recent history. The year 1896 marks his appearance on this planet as Abhay Charan De. In recognition of his profound insight into scriptural doctrine, he was later given the title Bhaktivedanta Swami. The many disciples around the world, who took shelter in his knowledge, refer to him, in reverence, as Srila Prabhupada.

The seriousness and eloquence with which Srila Prabhupada convinced so many individuals of the merits of the very profound and deep subject of God consciousness or Krishna consciousness is indeed thought provoking. He equated ignorance of the spiritual dimension in man to suicide. Such is the grave importance he attributed to spiritual knowledge. He spoke of our material existence and material priorities as misguided. He insisted that the key to distinguishing knowledge from nescience was to understand the true source of incentives for our thoughts and actions. He tirelessly spoke of, what he termed, the true purpose of human life. He sighted example after example of the misfortunes associated with being slaves to the senses. He declared God consciousness as the epitome of all scientific and philosophical pursuits.

Srila Prabhupada seems to have consciously promoted his movement as more scientific than religious. To some degree he alienates himself from existing religious practice and promotes Krishna consciousness as a process available to members of all faiths. Perhaps one reason for this was his dissatisfaction with the quality of existing practice, but a

more important reason was that he genuinely believed that the process of Krishna consciousness was one designed to attain the pinnacle of spiritual growth and enlightenment. One might expect that a movement that argues in favor of the merits of science would border on natural religion. Not so. In fact Srila Prabhupada vehemently adheres to revealed religious doctrine or shastra, but what makes it scientific is that he argues that practical experiences are not opposed to shastra, but rather reinforce shastra.

On the purpose of human life, Srila Prabhupada has an unequivocal answer. He declares the human being as an eternal servant of the Supreme personality of Godhead. He considers this the eternal constitutional position of the true self. Every other position attributed to an individual, he argues, is merely a temporary state designed to reveal this eternal constitutional position. He says that anyone who claims to be following Vedic shastras must declare the eternal (sanatana) occupation (dharma) of an individual to be one of servitude to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He adds that the only other bona fide occupation prescribed in the shastra is the varnashrama dharma. This relates to the identification of the four classes of natural aptitude available in all societies or varnas (laborers, merchants, military and priests), not to be confused with the birth caste system, and the four stages in human life or ashramas (student, householder, retired and renounced). He declares the varnashrama dharma as a method of purifying the conditioned tendencies and thereby elevating oneself to the point of recognizing one's sanatana dharma (true eternal occupation).

Over the years, The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT), The Back To Godhead magazine, The Bhaktivendanta Institute and the many devoted disciples who have started and maintained places of worship all around this globe, have done their part in promoting this intellectual philosophy of Krishna consciousness to people from all backgrounds.

My desire in this article is to discuss and attempt to reconcile the essence of Srila Prabhupada's arguments to support the scientific basis for God consciousness with the methods and processes accepted by the contemporary scientific community. It is my belief that those who are convinced of the merits of science and the scientific method will find the arguments presented by Srila Prabhupada to be fairly compelling. In the relatively recent history of science, there appears to be an underlying, yet unstated, assumption that religious doctrine and science are mutually exclusive with little hope for reconciliation. It is my hope that this article will, in some small measure, inspire the reader to attempt to bridge the gap between science and faith.

In my concluding remarks I share a more general set of

observations, not limited to modern science, that I hope adds further weight to the insights offered by scripture.

Science

While defining and understanding nomenclature is always a productive first step in any study, it also leaves a lot of room for pedantic and esoteric arguments that often detract from the original intent of the study. For the purpose of this article however, let me attempt to stay clear of controversies by stating definitions that seem to be generally acceptable in most academic circles.

The word "Science" is originally derived from the Latin word "Scientia", meaning, "having knowledge", as distinguished from ignorance or misunderstanding. Coincidentally, the word "Veda" shares a similar Sanskrit root. In its contemporary definition, science would constitute knowledge that is based on empirical evidence or logical derivation. It is certainly opposed to knowledge based on dogmatic beliefs. In essence, to be scientific would involve the application of reason on empirical data.

A study of western philosophy would date the birth of contemporary science at about 700-600 B.C. This period portrays a trend to abandon the powers of authority and religious doctrine in favor of the merits of reason. One speculative rational would have been the desire to correct misrepresentation and the abuse of power. Greece and her philosophers made a significant mark in the history of this period. Of the many philosophers, one of the early contributors to geometry was Pythagoras. In addition to deriving the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter, Pythagoras is also credited, in some quarters, as having invented the concept of squares of numbers. However, the most celebrated of classical philosophers were not those who explored mathematics or cosmology, but those who expounded on moral and ethical issues.

Socrates and Plato are often referred to as the Christians before Christ, for having concluded, based on reason and reason alone, that there existed two parallel worlds - one the imperfect in which we find ourselves and the other, the utopian. Aristotle, one of Plato's students, once again deviates from the moral philosophies back to the natural sciences. His interest, however, was not in mathematics or physics but in the observation of life and associated change. Perhaps a product of his background in the moral philosophies and his interest in the natural sciences culminates in his dissertation on rhetoric. To this day, science leverages his contributions to that aspect of rhetoric called "logos" or logic.

One consequence of the move from the moral philosophies to the natural sciences appears to be the increased emphasis on observation by the senses (visual being the most common). This seems to come at the expense of observations from within (mind or consciousness). The argument that is often presented to support this shift is one related to subjectivity versus objectivity. The feelings experienced by an individual cannot be reproduced at will by another individual. Hence it is argued to be too subjective to warrant attention from the objective sciences.

In concluding this brief discussion on science and its roots, it is worth restating that the original intent of science relates to knowledge gathering based on reason. We are in search of the cause of our existence and our environment. We want to know where we come from and where we go from here. We recognize our mortal nature. Hence we recognize the limited time available for this study. Based on these constraints, it is up to us to determine if we should restrict the boundaries of our search by self-imposed arguments of subjectivity and objectivity.

Some of the most celebrated minds in the history of science have, in fact, alluded to the limitations of science. Max Planck (Nobel prize winner for physics in 1918) once said: "Science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of Nature. And that is because in the last analysis, we ourselves are part of the mystery that we are trying to solve".

The Scientific Method

The scientific method is a process used to reconcile observation in a particular field of study with an existing or discernable "rule" that applies to that field of study. These rules are primarily justified by observational evidence. They can also be arrived at, by extrapolating other rules, through the application of logic.

In a field of research where there are no existing rules, the scientific method usually involves the observation of a phenomenon followed by the postulating of a hypothesis (potentially a future rule) to explain the observation. The hypothesis is then used to explain other existing phenomena in that particular field of study, as well as predicting future observations. Finally, if the hypothesis cannot be disputed by any known phenomenon, it is conferred the status of a rule, law or theory.

Once a rule is established in a particular field of study, all

new observations in that field are first explained using the existing rule. If such an explanation fails to satisfy all the observational characteristics, the existing rule is once again challenged as being inconclusive.

To draw a parallel with Aristotle's rhetoric, and logic in particular, all logical arguments must start with an irrefutable fact or "premise". The first step in any logical analysis is to validate the premise that is presented. In one sense the premise corresponds to the "rule" defined by the scientific method. It is the starting point for all subsequent conclusions.

Srila Prabhupada's Premise

Srila Prabhupada plays the role of an instructor who teaches by example (Acharya), and who explains profound, eternal and often abstract truths by relating to contemporary material concepts that are easy to analyze and comprehend. If I were to ever be assigned the difficult task of identifying the singular, most important, attribute that allows Srila Prabhupada to excel beyond imagination in his role as an instructor, it would have to be his ways with analogy.

The singular message of Srila Prabhupada's teachings, is the declaration of an eternal relationship of love between a living entity and The Supreme Personality of Godhead. The premise that he builds upon, in all his presentations, involves distinguishing the body of a living entity from its life-giving force, the eternal soul. He justifies this premise by arguing that all the physical elements relating to the body are still available at the instant of death, although they may deteriorate quickly soon after. (This observation is not disputable based on my limited understanding of the biological sciences. If there is scientific data to refute this claim, it would certainly make for constructive debate.) His hypothesis then follows that, at the instant of death, something that is not visible to the naked eye disappears. He calls this energy-giving substance the eternal Soul, without which the physical elements that constitute the living body are of no avail. He then reconciles this consistent and observable phenomenon with statements from the scripture that explicitly declare the existence of the eternal soul. Thus he argues that the explicit declarations in the scripture are not and need not be accepted as dogmatic beliefs that will not withstand inquiry from the scientific mind. He, in fact, invites such inquiry to reinforce the validity and credibility of scriptural injunctions.

It is my personal assessment that in situations where there

appears to be contradictions, or at least no direct correlation, between empirical evidence and scriptural doctrine, Srila Prabhupada would warn us against dismissing scriptural statements on the basis of insufficient evidence. One inference would be the argument that our knowledge and exposure to the workings of the universe are far too limited to make the necessary judgment calls. On the surface this appears like a convenient ploy to dodge the rules of science. On the other hand, one may logically argue that if some aspects of scripture can be reconciled with current empirical evidence, then perhaps there is room for increased reconciliation as our empirical and scriptural understandings broadens. For as long as science is unable to conclusively uncover the mysteries of our existence and our environment, it only seems reasonable and fair that we remain open to all avenues of knowledge. Such openness is, in fact, a statement of the scientific method.

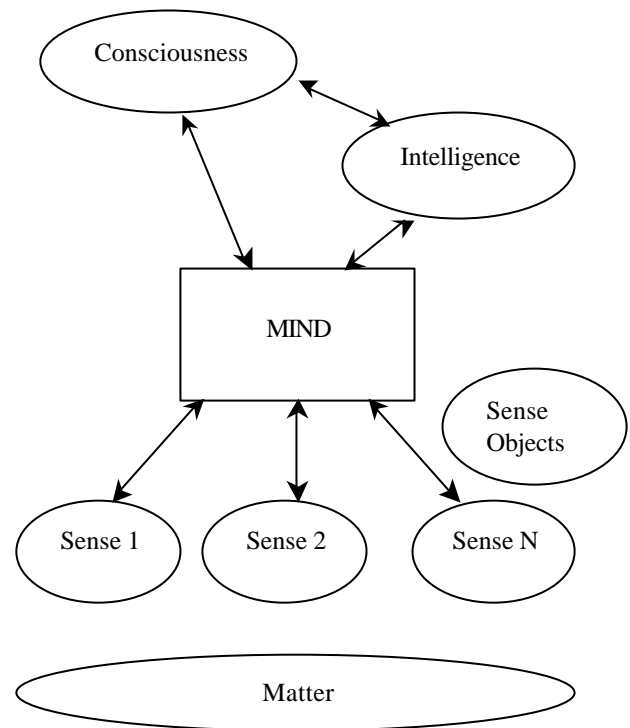
Bhagavad-Gita Introduced

The Bhagavad-Gita is often the starting point and primary text in the study of Vedic scripture. It is an historical dialog between Krishna (The Supreme Personality of Godhead) and Arjuna (Krishna’s friend and devotee) that occurred approximately 3000 years ago. The scene is the battlefield of Kurukshetra where Arjuna is engaged in a war with his cousins, the Kurus, over the leadership of the kingdom. Krishna acts as Arjuna’s Charioteer. Arjuna, a celebrated warrior and one of the finest pupils of his teacher, Drona, is, however, overcome with grief when faced with the reality of having to kill his own kinsmen, elders and instructors who have taken sides with the Kurus. He questions the merits of the exercise even if he can win the entire kingdom in return. What subsequently transpires between Krishna and Arjuna will be recorded by history as a source of unparalleled knowledge and wisdom presented as a literary masterpiece that is characterized by its boldness, directness and simplicity in addressing deep, profound and, sometimes, abstract eternal truths. Whatever your faith, your convictions or your stance, to go through life without reading the eighteen chapters of the Bhagavad-Gita, at least once, would be to miss out on an unequalled piece of writing.

Constituents of The Body

The Bhagavad-Gita discusses the composition of the living

body in a hierarchical manner. In its simplistic model, The Gita declares that **“The working senses are superior to dull matter; mind is higher than the senses; intelligence is still higher than the mind; and he [the soul] is even higher than the intelligence.”** {BG:3-42}



The Gita then goes on to recommend the source of strength to control the mind. **“Thus knowing oneself to be transcendental to the material senses, mind and intelligence, O might-armed Arjuna, one should steady the mind by deliberate spiritual intelligence [Krishna consciousness] and thus – by spiritual strength – conquer this insatiable enemy known as lust.”** {BG:3-43}

In the purport to this verse, Srila Prabhupada notes that *“one may not give up work and prescribed duties all of a sudden; but by gradually developing Krishna consciousness, one can be situated in a transcendental position without being influenced by the material senses and the mind – by steady intelligence directed toward one’s pure identity.”*

Here we have a process being prescribed for the elevation of the soul to a higher platform free from the influences of the senses and sense objects. The process is described as

requiring constant and determined effort but the execution of change is expected to be gradual. In mathematics, there is a concept of a “unit-step” function. This is a function that goes from state zero to state one in zero time. Practically, however, a change of state in zero time is a recipe for an unstable system. In fact, our understanding of the workings of matter is such that no change occurs in zero time. Often we want to reach a new state in minimal time, ideally in zero time. But the oscillations associated with sudden change makes such systems of no practical relevance. It appears that our empirical understanding of the nature around us shares something in common with the prescription for our nature within.

This struggle of the mind is a central theme in the Gita. It is conquered only through the perfection in control, which in turn is only achieved through obedience to divine instructions. The strength and determination required to remain obedient is a gift given to those who express a desire for it through devotional service. There is an explicit inquiry related to this requirement for control, in which the mind is compared to the wind and hence impossible to control. The response to this inquiry is equally explicit. While acknowledging the process of controlling the mind as difficult, it is declared that it is not impossible. The mind is declared as having the potential to be the best of friends or the worst of enemies.

So far there is the clear indication that the true self is transcendental to the senses, the mind and the intelligence. Consciousness is presented as a reflection of the soul and hence is part of the true self. So at the time of death, is the soul the only entity that moves on to the next body? If so, to what avail is all the training and strengthening provided to the mind in any given life? The answers to these questions take us to chapter 15 of the Gita.

“The living entity in the material world carries his different conceptions of life from one body to another, as the air carries aromas. Thus he takes one kind of body and again quits it to take another.” {BG:15-8}

Srila Prabhupada explains... *“Here the living entity is described as ishvara, the controller of his own body. If he likes, he can change his body to a higher grade, and if he likes he can move to a lower class. Minute independence is there. The change his body undergoes depends upon him. At the time of death, the consciousness he has created will carry him on to the next type of body. If he has made his consciousness like that of a cat or dog, he is sure to change to a cat’s or dog’s body. And if he has fixed his consciousness on godly qualities, he will change into the form of a demigod.*

And if he is in Krishna consciousness, he will be transferred to Krishnaloka in the spiritual world and will associate with Krishna. It is a false claim that after the annihilation of this body everything is finished. The individual soul is transmigrating from one body to another, and his present body and present activities are the background of his next body. One gets a different body according to karma, and he has to quit this body in due course. It is stated here that the subtle body, which carries the conception of the next body, develops another body in the next life. This process of transmigrating from one body to another and struggling while in the body is called Karsati, or struggle for existence.”

Based on this verse we know that the concept of freewill exists to the extent that we are in control of our next body. We also know that the conceptions of life that we entertain, accompany us from one body to another. Hence the element of eternity captured by the soul, includes our reflections and understandings of our being, our origins and our environment. While this knowledge is in a constant state of development, it is not lost at the time of death.

Lord Caitanya Introduced

Lord Caitanya, also referred to as Mahaprabhu, appeared in Mayapur, India on the 18th of February 1486 A.D. He accepted the renounced order of life (Sannyasa) at the early age of 24 and promoted the philosophy that the Supreme Personality of Godhead is, inconceivably, simultaneously one with and different from His creation (*acintya-bhedabheda-tattva*). He promoted the chanting of the Holy Names of the Lord because the associated sound vibrations are in itself an incarnation of the Lord. He argued that since the Lord is the absolute whole, there is no difference between His holy name and His transcendental form.

In Srila Prabhupada’s preface to the “Teachings of Lord Chaitanya”, He states *“Lord Caitanya is the ideal teacher of life’s prime necessities. He is the most munificent bestower of love of Krishna. He is the complete reservoir of all mercies and good fortune. As confirmed in Srimad-Bhagavatam, Bhagavad-Gita, Mahabharata and the Upanisads, He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krishna Himself, and He is worshipable by everyone in this age of disagreement.”*

Srila Prabhupada, and the lineage that he represents, recognizes Lord Chaitanya as an incarnation of God Himself. This is an important distinguishing feature that

bears on the philosophy that Srila Prabhupada promotes. Among the nuances that differentiate the different lineages, the position accorded to Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabu is important and relevant in appreciating the thrust of Srila Prabhupada's message

Srila Prabhupada's Message

Let us revisit Srila Prabhupada's premise which distinguishes the living body from its eternal Soul and derive the central theme of his message. Srila Prabhupada argues that the soul is eternal and keeps migrating from one body to another, while the body, which serves as a transient covering for the soul in any particular manifestation, appears at the time of birth and vanishes at the time of death.

The logical question that follows relates to the rules that govern the next destination of the Soul, and whether these rules will give some indication as to the original starting point in this sojourn of the Soul. On the issue of rules governing the next destination of the Soul, Srila Prabhupada is very clear - he insists that, not only do they exist, but they are very strictly followed with very few exceptions. As to the original starting point in the sojourn of the soul, the answer is less clear. In fact he claims the beginning of our present material existence cannot be traced. Instead, he questions the relevance of this information.

In material existence, Srila Prabhupada elaborates that one is limited by the reactions of his past actions. Every individual in material existence has an innate nature. This nature dictates the traits of personality and other such signatures that characterize individuals into unique moulds, and consequently define their potentials. To deny this uniqueness is to deny human experience. To then make the leap and link that to human potential is to accept destiny. Srila Prabhupada argues that these traits are not mere random occurrences but the perfect application of a universal law of action and reaction (Karma).

Srila Prabhupada however, does not dwell on the subject of destiny. Instead he concentrates on a more fundamental issue. He concludes that irrespective of the destiny that one entitles oneself to, material existence cannot offer eternal happiness. By its very definition, material existence is transient, and in every step of the way, there are far too many incentives to succumb to forces that are tied to unwelcome reactionary effects. Srila Prabhupada concentrates his energy

on the means to escape the characteristic cycle of birth, death, old age and disease associated with material existence.

Srila Prabhupada clearly articulates those factors that tie us into this web of material existence. This knowledge is particularly relevant, for one determined to come out of material existence. In his book titled "The Science of Self-realization", Srila Prabhupada speaks of five chains that anchor us in mundane consciousness. Attachment to the material body at the expense of spiritual insight, attachment to kinsmen through relationships, attachment to land through birth and possessions, attachment to material science (science devoid of spiritual insight), and attachment to rituals without recognizing the true personality of Godhead. The key word in all these anchors is "attachment". The Bhagavad-Gita compares this to a deeply rooted banyan tree, which is ever increasing its hold on the earth, whose real form cannot be perceived, and no one can see where it ends, where it begins or where its foundation is. The metaphorical recommendation given in the Gita and reiterated by Srila Prabhupada is cut down this banyan tree with determination, using the weapon of detachment.

All attachments are mere statements of illusion proclaimed by the mind. One can very practically conclude that we are not in control over the quality or time span of any form of attachment. So these declarations related to attachment should not disturb a mind that has contemplated the practical realities of human existence. So how do we find the strength to acquire this weapon of detachment? And what does detachment truly entail? This takes us back to the significant role played by the mind, and the difficulty associated with controlling the mind.

Though illusory in academic analysis, the statements of the mind can feel very real and overwhelming to the participating individual. Srila Prabhupada acknowledges this fact and recommends a process to counteract these illusory forces. This process is in accordance with the teachings of the Bhagavad-Gita.

In text 48, chapter 2 of the Bhagavad-Gita, Krishna defines the term "yoga" as the sincere performance of duty without attachment to success or failure. This should not be taken as a license for a lack of passion or lethargy in the execution of duty, as indicated in BG:14-8 and BG:18-28. In the subsequent text (text 49), Krishna recommends devotional service as the way to keep abominable activities (activities tied to unwelcome reactions) far distant. Based on these two

versus alone, one can conclude that to achieve perfection in the control of the mind, one may engage the mind in two activities – devotional service and the performance of Varnashrama related duties (duties based on individual aptitude and material circumstance). Interestingly enough, it would be hard to come up with any more activities for the mind in the entire Bhagavad-Gita.

Perhaps the single most important verse in the Bhagavad-Gita is text 63 of Chapter 18. **“Thus I have explained to you knowledge still more confidential. Deliberate on this fully, and then do what you wish to do”**. Here Krishna reveals an aspect of His personality. He is not the boss who is continually nagging us about our misdeeds. Instead He explains the consequences of our actions clearly and then asks us to do as we please. This aspect of His nature clearly favors those who exercise intelligence over the foolish. A foolish individual requires constant policing. An intelligent individual picks up on the consequences long before it becomes a personal experience.

Srila Prabhupada’s recommended processes to counteract the forces of illusion are rooted in knowledge derived from Vedic scripture. In particular he draws on the teachings of Lord Caitanya as a practical guide to the revelations in the Bhagavad-Gita. He argues that yoga and regulative principles (or the conscious control of the mind), are a necessary first step for souls who are deeply entangled in the inferior energies associated with sense gratification. However, for souls who have found their way out of the dense forest of illusion, he recommends that they no longer restrain their senses but rather engage them in devotional service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Regulative Principles

Regulative principles are aimed at continually minimizing the influence the senses hold over the mind. This reduction in influence is equivalent to an equally increased influence held by intelligence and consciousness over the mind. If we relate this back to the moral philosophies of Socrates and Plato, there is concurrence over the importance in exercising intelligence and consciousness (inner feelings of right and wrong) in making the decisions of the mind.

There are four regulative principles recommended in the one of the commentaries on the Vedic literature (Bhagavad-

purana-1.17.38) that Srila Prabhupada reiterates as a requirement in making further progress in the spiritual path. These principles are discussed below.

1) Intoxication in any form is forbidden. This should come as no surprise. We are dealing with a mind that seems to have trouble with control in the best of circumstances. And so any intoxicant will only aggravate the situation.

2) Meat eating is also forbidden. The act of slaughter for sense gratification is considered very violent and sinful. The diet prescribed is a vegetarian diet as opposed to a vegan diet. Dairy products such as milk and butter are an integral part of the diet. Eggs are however disallowed. All food preparations are first offered to the Lord and only the remnants of such offerings are consumed. This act of offering food to the Lord prior to consumption is a categorical requirement in Bhagavad-Gita. All food stuffs consumed prior to offering to the Lord is declared in the Bhagavad-Gita as the consumption of sin.

3) Gambling is forbidden. One is expected to earn a living through legitimate means and not go in search of windfalls.

4) Illicit sexual activity is strictly forbidden. The only prescribed form of contraception is abstinence!

Recently I read a commentary on the public outrage, which could have almost bordered on humor, to a similar declaration on sex by the Vatican. In all fields of human endeavor, there are often two categories of individuals. The first kind would always try to lower the bars of standard, while the second kind would always try to creep up to the bars of standard. To lower the bars of standard often presents instant gratification as an incentive. To creep up to the bars of standard can present difficult and sometimes seemingly insurmountable hurdles. But on matters that relate to scriptural injunctions, to lower the bars of standard would be to compromise on the essence of scripture. Certainly few would argue that as a logical option.

The dimension of time

The dimension of time and the associated ages are an integral part of Vedic knowledge. The material universe is said to have days and nights of equal length. Each day of the material universe (also known as “kalpa”), consists of a thousand cycles of four ages or “yugas”. These yugas have

varying lengths and characteristics.

The first yuga, known as “Satya” yuga which lasts 1,728,000 years and is characterized by virtue, wisdom and religion, with no trace of vice or ignorance.

The second yuga, known as “Treta” yuga, lasts 1,296,000 years. In this yuga vice is introduced.

The third yuga, known as “Dvapara” yuga, lasts 864,000 years and is characterized by a decline in virtue and religious practice.

The fourth and last yuga is “Kali” yuga which lasts 432,000 years. It is characterized by quarrel, ignorance, irreligion and vice. We are presently 5000 years into this yuga in the 28th cycle of the present day of the material universe.

The material universe has an estimated life of 100 years - each year made of 360 of such days and nights. While this may seem like eternity in human years, it is referred to in scripture to be as brief as a lightning flash.

In Dr. Richard Thompson’s dissertation on *Vedic Cosmography and Astronomy*, he validates the claims of the Jyotisa shastra (astrological shastra) that February 18th 3102 B.C. marks the beginning of the current age of Kali–Yuga. This is the day when all the 7 planets used in the Jyotisa shastra (including the Sun and the Moon and excluding Rahu and Ketu) are aligned in one straight line on one side of the earth. I have always thought of the research conducted by Dr. Thompson to reconcile the relevance of this date from both a Vedic and a scientific standpoint to be a model that we should all follow in all areas of empirical research.

Chanting the Holy Names

The age of Kali is known to offer a shorter life span with less conducive environments for spiritual growth. Hence, Lord Caitanya Mahaprabu prescribes the easier process of engaging oneself in the energy of the Lord invested in His names as the recommend process for self-realization in this age.

Of all Holy Names, the Maha-Mantra (*Hare Krishna Hare Krishna - Krishna Krishna Hare Hare - Hare Rama Hare Rama - Rama Rama Hare Hare*) is acknowledged by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabu, as the most effective. While there are no limitations on when, where and how many times the Maha-mantra may be chanted, Srila Prabhupada recommends that

at a minimum we commit to chanting the Maha-Mantra 16 rounds on the 108 bead counting chain, also known as the Japa mala. This translates to 1,728 times every day. He also details the mood of humility required to derive the full benefits of chanting the Holy Name. He compares this mood to one of a child crying for a mother’s attention.

Comparative Religion

The challenge of promoting the ancient Vedic tradition in a modern Christian society raises questions on the differences in faith and practice. Any study into Srila Prabhupada’s early days in the west would demonstrate the intensity of this culture shock. To its credit, the western society had, over the generations, developed an openness to accept and entertain concepts and traditions that were radically different from the accepted norms. This demeanor was instrumental to Srila Prabhupada’s success in establishing an alternative lifestyle.

Srila Prabhupada was never opposed to other faiths. What he opposed to was the lack of sincerity and honesty in the pursuit of the spiritual dimension in mankind. He argued that the yardstick used to measure the merits of a religion was based on how much love it inspired in an individual for the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

On the Christian faith, Srila Prabhupada was very accepting of the rules prescribed in the commandments, and the teachings of Christ, but he disagreed with some of the commonly accepted interpretations. For example, he disputed vehemently that the commandment not to kill, could be interpreted to limit its scope to humans alone. To have dominion over the animals was not a license to kill them to satisfy the urges of the senses, he argued. A more controversial disagreement surrounds the issue of the Trinity. Srila Prabhupada accepted Christ as a Son of God, but not as God Himself.

Conclusion

As we humans sail through life on this planet, some of us will be consumed by the merits and demerits of our social and political systems. A few others will instead contemplate on the deeper subject that relates to the very source of our existence. Scripture, science, metaphysics

and mystical revelations will all serve as tools we use in these pursuits. Whichever path you choose, there is a good chance that the motivations for your pursuits are in fact a statement of dissatisfaction with our norms, our environment and our times. Although a few might argue that it is mere curiosity.

My guess is that those who sincerely pursue bettering our social and political systems will quickly conclude that we have a history of experimenting with different systems. What we celebrate today as the best that man has come up with, we will dump tomorrow into the “ash heap of history”. At its core, social and political systems are effectively management systems. On management, a friend once shared a rather unique observation that if a group of people required to be managed, then they are probably not worth managing. The underlying moral being that, effective management cannot be legislated. It has to come from within.

A better option would be to pursue a process that instills the virtues of self-governance and accountability in each individual being. One of the earliest western philosophers to proclaim its merits was Socrates. Socrates argued that the way we conduct our lives was more important than finding the equations that described the earth’s position among the stars. His conclusions were to be later shared by Christ. However, as we know today, Christ had a different source of information to arrive at the same conclusion. This is one example of how the conclusions arrived through the process of reason agree with the principles of scripture.

A more recent western philosopher, Bertand Rusell once said that the “secret of happiness is to face the fact that the world is horrible, horrible, horrible”. The word “world” is simply the collective “we”. This is a common theme in religious doctrine. There is a better place. But we must better our thoughts and our ways before we can promote ourselves. Here is another example of an extreme liberal, who questioned the merits of conservative norms, arriving at the same conclusion proclaimed by conservative scripture.

Our social and political systems revolve around economic growth and development. The industrial age promised an abundance of supply. And deliver they did, but only to a few. 300 years later, the scientific and engineering communities are struggling with issues of sustainability, global warming and pollution. It strikes me that the industrial age has taught us to exploit the resources of nature at an unprecedented rate. Now we have become accustomed to overindulgence

and waste. We have become conditioned to our exploits. We can no longer do without them. At the same time, we are not too pleased with the methods and processes in place to pay for these elaborate services that have suddenly become necessities. I feel strongly that these are all consequences of unguided and random experimentation with social and political systems, without regard for the most fundamental tenet of simplicity recommended in scripture. Here again we see how practical realities reinforce the merits of scriptural injunctions.

The conclusions that we arrive at based on reason and experience are not always diametrically opposed to scripture. In the case of some of the most celebrated minds in philosophy, their conclusions appear to concur with scripture.

If we are sincere in our quest for knowledge, then there is ample evidence to suggest the merits of scriptural doctrine. Scriptural knowledge relies on our faith in a Superior and perfect Creator. Empirical knowledge relies on data acquired by our inferior senses and analyzed by our not so superior mind. Philosophical knowledge relies in our ability to reason using the rules of logic that have been shown to be quite capable of arriving at false conclusions.

I am not suggesting that we abandon empirical and philosophical pursuits. They have a place in our quest for knowledge, but let us always endeavor to reconcile knowledge derived from these sources with knowledge available in scripture. Let us think twice before acting on knowledge derived purely from empirical and philosophical sources, especially if they directly contradict scriptural knowledge, lest we pay too high a price when we discover our mistakes.

Some of us, though sincere in our quest of true knowledge, have been disillusioned by the propensity for misinterpretation and, in extreme cases, alteration of scripture by those entrusted with the responsibility of promoting scriptural knowledge. History validates these concerns. The onus of preserving and protecting scripture falls on all living beings. It is our most valuable inheritance. And even if we find no use for it in our own lives, we have a responsibility to pass it, unchanged, to future generations. To my knowledge, Srila Prabhupada has never expressed concern over the alteration of Vedic scripture. He backs this claim by the fact that the substance of the texts that he has authorized remains the same in many different geographical locations with different lineages. But he has repeatedly alerted us to

misinterpretation.

In conclusion, let me salute the efforts of the Bhaktivedanta institute for their attempts at reconciling modern science with the teachings of the Vedas. In particular I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the works of Dr. Richard Thompson. His intellectual capacity combined with his sincere passion for finding eternal truths without exercising bias in judgment, continually driven by the logical analysis of available data, adds tremendous credibility to the process, and remains a constant source of inspiration.

Susheel Gopalan

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