

Rabbi and I: Equality Based on the Soul

Exploring The Jewish root in the Vedas

World Peace and Spiritual Advancement Based on the Common Understanding
Of the Soul

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Dedication and Preface

I would like to dedicate this book to those who have given me the inspiration to compile it and have joined me in living its principles.

First, I owe everything to my spiritual father, my Guru, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. He has so patiently prodded me to take responsibility for my life and share my realizations with others. We offer this book to him on his Appearance Day, August 26, 1997.

Next is His Holiness Satsvarupa das Gosvami, my very dear godbrother. When I first heard him speak in Miami in 1974, the words of our Guru poured forth, presented without ego. I knew, here was a spiritual friend and guide to share my life with.

There were times when I felt lost with no support. During those trying times in Miami our close group of friends, Param Dhama das and his wife Trayodisha devi dasi and Madhava Ashraya das and his wife Anjana Suta devi dasi were always bringing me new books and heaps of well-wishes. And my extraordinary wife Mrnalini dasi, who has assisted me in countless ways. I certainly could not have accomplished any of this without her support.

I would also like to thank Dharma das, my co-writer, who has spent endless hours editing and developing the deep devotional mood of the book.

I began this manuscript the winter of 1976. I was travelling with Satsvarupa das Goswami, touring colleges and lecturing about Vedic philosophy. We were

reading in the library between classes when I asked him the hundredth time to write a book about sub-religious principles (customs, rituals, prayers etc.). He caught me off guard this time, and told me I should write it. After a few attempts I gave up. But as we moved around the country I had many occasions to test my thoughts and ideas on the college professors we met.

On the road, reading was our main pastime. After rereading the Five Books of Moses (the Old Testament) and the New Testament more times than my godbrothers approved of, I became convinced that the spiritual message presented by the Jews was of the same essence as the Vedic tradition I was now exploring.

Having married and sharing the wonderful birth and development of our daughter (Abhaya), my wife and I moved back to Miami, to be near our relatives. It was here in Miami that His Holiness Jaya Advaita Swami gave me Hebrew translations of the Bhagavad-gita As It Is and the Srimad Bhagavatam to share with my Jewish neighbors. I was not able to convince my neighbors to read the books, but I became determined to open an inter-religious dialogue based on the similarities I had discovered. Fourteen years of continued study have passed; I have redoubled again and again my belief that the Jewish and Vedic oral traditions are the same. From the time of creation what the Jews call Yeda and the Hindus call Veda is the root of all spiritual knowledge.

Introduction

World Peace: we all hanker for it. Even with the sincere attempts of our most stalwart planning commissions and religious leaders, the world's problems seem unfathomable. As long as crime, disease, racial and religious prejudice, and especially our determined drive for materialism plague us, peace will remain merely an unrealized utopia. Adherents to the Judeo-Christian tradition would like to have the kingdom of God manifest on earth. The Hindu tradition also aspires for Rama-rajya, or the kingdom of God on earth. Our mistake is to want the kingdom of God to enjoy without the presence of God.

An error of modern society and religion is to identify the body as the self. The Bhagavad-gita clearly explains that we should see and accept the spiritual essence (the soul) of each living being as spiritually equal. There it is said, "The humble sage, by virtue of true knowledge, sees with equal vision a learned and gentle brahmana, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a dog-eater [outcast]. [Bg. 5.18] How does the learned sage see every living entity with equal vision? He sees the spirit soul within the heart of each of God's creations. He understands that although living forms may appear different, those appearances are only the external coverings for the soul, and that spiritually we are all equal. A careful analysis shows that all problems result from our first mistake of identifying the body as the self. If we identify ourselves by race, religion and ethnic group we

will then suffer or enjoy the results of that identity, but the fact is we are spiritually equal and the bodily identity that we accept is both temporary and insignificant compared to our eternal spiritual identity. We suffer due to birth, disease, old age and death; we need not identify with the body, which is being afflicted by these difficulties. If everyone understood and acted on the level of the soul rather than the body, the world's problems would practically cease.

Understanding the difference between matter and spirit and that God is the controller of all things is the essence of knowledge.

It is natural that when we become overwhelmed by difficulties, we become aware of our dependence on God. Unfortunately, due to our deep attachment to materialism, we are drawn to perceive religion in much the same manner, as we perceive ordinary social activities. That is, we become attached to identifying with the external or social side of religion, while we forget its essence - loving service to God.

Our modern use of the word religion expresses an external alterable faith, while the Sanskrit word **dharma** implies an internal or essential eternal relationship with God. Our religion or faith can change but the soul's relationship with God is eternal. For example, I may claim that I am a Christian today, but I may adopt the practices of a Hindu or of a Jew tomorrow. However, whatever faith you may follow, the essence of that faith is loving service to God. That eternal essence of our faith is what the Vedas refer to as **sanatana-dharma**. Dharma is a Sanskrit term that refers to the essence of something; that essence that cannot be separated from the object. For example, the dharma of fire is heat and light. Without heat and light fire cannot exist. The dharma of water is liquidity. Similarly, the dharma of every living entity is service. Every living entity serves another. The employee serves the employer. The parents serve the young children. Even the trees and plants serve others by providing shade, fruits, flowers or firewood. Voluntary service is the symptom of love, and the perfection of the serving propensity is to serve the Supreme Lord fully. Therefore, sanatana-dharma, the eternal occupational activity of the soul, or the eternal religion is service to God, or love of God.

Sanatana-dharma is the real focus of Equality Based on the Soul. The inquisitive reader of Equality Based on the Soul should not underestimate this book as simply another treatise on comparative religion, a standard comparison of religious customs, names of God, rituals, philosophical likeness and differences, religious histories and so on. Of course, the reader will find that those comparisons are here in plenty, but their special significance is that each and every point of comparison expands and strongly establishes the truth, that the essence of every religious faith is loving service to God.

Sanatana-dharma, the essence of the Vedic culture, predates all of our present religious faiths. As shown in this book, the reader will see the many similarities between Judaism and Hinduism. They are both by-products of the Vedic culture, which was neither Hindu, Jewish, Christian, or Muslim. No doubt, an in-depth

study of other religious faiths would bring to surface many other similarities. The essence of Vedic culture, the eternal nonsectarian godly society, has permeated all religious faiths for thousands of years. Unfortunately, with the passing of time, the trend of society's religious concerns has moved from internal to external or from the essence to the superficial. This has led to discord and conflict within society. As will be explained in Equality Based on the Soul, a society, which is not in the true sense God-centered will always remain in difficulty.

The Vedic culture was a God-centered religious social system. Every aspect of society was designed to help people advance in spiritual life. In the strict sense of the word, religion is meant to be a way of life, which comprises all other activities. With the passing of time, society's trend has been to change from spiritual orientation to the material. Of course, the world has suffered greatly for this deviation. As you read through Equality Based on the Soul, we urge that while appreciating the many comparisons made between these two major religious paths, you take special note to understand how each of those comparisons points toward the principles of equality based on the soul and its natural conclusion, loving service to God.

Although this first writing of Equality Based on the Soul is presented as a comparison between Hinduism and Judaism, this is only the beginning. In future writings we will expand this book to include the other religions. The religions of the world are all related to one another. Judaism and Christianity are so closely related that they are frequently referred to in unison as the Judeo-Christian tradition. Judaism existed long before the appearance of Jesus Christ, and in fact Christianity arose as a sect within Judaism. Later, in the seventh century, the Prophet Mohammed founded Islam, the religion of the Muslims. He was preaching the same faith as the founders of Judaism and Christianity. He felt that although the original teachings were pure, some followers became corrupt resulting in adulterated scriptures. He did not hesitate to differ with them when he felt their teachings were wrong. Muslims believe that Mohammed is the final Prophet and his religion is the final instruction for all mankind. This book is in complete agreement with the Holy Koran; we will show that the Sanskrit A is the A in Allah. Thus, these three traditions are closely related.

Hinduism seems at first to stand a little separate from this group, but it is most closely related to the original Vedic culture. Historically, the Vedic culture predates all religions, so it is not surprising that we have found many similarities between Judaism and Hinduism. The real essence of the Vedic culture, uninterrupted loving service to God without material motivation, shines through the external manifestations of all religious paths.

Equality Based on the Soul is presented as a fictional conversation, but it is strongly supported by scriptural reference from both the Hindu and Jewish scriptures. The information presented in this book came from a variety of written sources listed in the bibliography, as well as actual conversations between representatives of the two traditions. Many topics will be discussed in this book,

but the most important message transmitted herein is that the concepts of the soul and God are very similar, far too similar to ignore the probability of their having common roots. The English word Jewish, which expresses the idea of a religious society, is not found in the Old Testament. Similarly, Hinduism also alludes to a religious society, but is found nowhere in the Vedas, the scriptures followed by the Hindus. Both sincere Hindus and Jews believe that being devoted to the Lord's service will spiritually elevate them.

In conclusion, we urge our readers to keep in mind that we are not attempting to create a new religion. God is the source of religious inspiration. Nor are we suggesting that the spiritual truth given in this book is applicable to only Hinduism or Judaism. Rather, we have presented these conversations between two religious faiths as a medium to pass on an eternal truth that can and should be applied to every aspect of our lives.

We show that a non-sectarian religious culture exists eternally, its supporting philosophy having been established by God and transmitted to us from the beginning of creation. That non-sectarian philosophy is based on the souls' eternal loving and serving relationship with God. It is not based on an impractical attempt to synthesize the external rituals, customs and traditions of the world religions. There is only one God and we are all children of God. We are not proposing that anyone give up his religion, but that by truly understanding the spiritual essence of religion one can become a more perfect Jew, Hindu, Christian or Muslim. Effective religious practice will help us give up the desire for material enjoyment and simultaneously become attached to the service of God.

As long as religious teachers and spiritual guides emphasize the external symptoms of their affiliations and neglect their real essence, unmotivated and uninterrupted service to God, society's spiritual void will continue. Whatever a great person does common people follow. We are naturally inclined to follow, especially in religious matters. If world leaders do not realize and act upon the spiritual essence of their religion, they will not be able to help their followers and citizens. Understanding the spiritual essence assures spiritual potency.

Being God-centered does not remove our difficulties or anxieties. Rather, it will help us see things in proper perspective. We will see the difference between temporary material activities and eternal spiritual activities. We will be able to tolerate all kinds of temporary inconveniences and difficulties as we strive for the ultimate goal, developing love of God and returning to His eternal abode.

Chapter One: JEWISH SOULS AND OTHERS

DEVOTEE: Rabbi, according to Jewish understanding, is there ultimately any difference between the soul of a person born in a Jewish family and the soul of someone who is not? Do Jews have any advantage over non-Jews in their ability to realize and love God?

RABBI: After close examination, I've concluded that the general principles of the soul, the creation, God, and His manifestations are surprisingly similar in all spiritual traditions. Furthermore, full realization of God can be achieved by anyone regardless of his race, religion or nationality. Here is a verse that confirms this point: 'Elijah said, "I bring heaven and earth to bear witness that any human being, Jew or Gentile, man or woman, freeman or slave, according to his deeds, can become worthy of Ruach HaKodesh, the Holy Spirit, the transcendental experience."' [Tana DeBei Eliahu Rabba 9] [Bahir II:94]

DEVOTEE: The Vedic philosophy propounds a similar principle that proves we all have an equal opportunity to realize and love God and to achieve His eternal abode. According to Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad-gita, "To those who are constantly devoted and worship Me with love, I give the understanding by which they can come back to Me." [Bg. 10.10] The Bhagavad-gita also teaches that we are spiritually equal and that our spiritual identity is far more important than any external considerations. There it is said, "Those who are seers of the truth have concluded that of the nonexistent [the material body] there is no endurance and of the eternal [the soul] there is no change. This they have concluded by studying the nature of both". [Bg. 2.16] Therefore, our real identity is spirit soul.

Temporarily identifying ourselves as man or woman, Jew or Hindu, rich man or poor man ultimately has no bearing on our ability to realize God. God is eternal and we are eternally His servants regardless of how we identify ourselves at the present moment.

RABBI: Now of course many people identify themselves as Jews, others as Hindus, Muslims, or Christians. Frequently, religious followers are taught to think that they are on the right path and that everyone else is wrong. Yet, if we are to accept that we all have an equal chance to achieve love of God, then we must also accept that there is some underlying thread that ties all religions together in spite of their different scriptures, rituals, and culture. Considering the Vedic emphasis that we are spiritual by nature, how do the Vedas explain the essence of religion?

DEVOTEE: In his introduction to the Bhagavad-gita As It Is, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada explains that point very nicely. "The English word religion is a little different from the Vedic word, sanatana-dharma, the essence of religion. Religion conveys the idea of faith, and faith may change. One may have faith in a particular process, and he may change this faith and adopt another, but sanatana-dharma refers to that activity which cannot be changed. For instance, liquidity cannot be taken from water, nor can heat be taken from fire. Similarly, the eternal function of the eternal living entity cannot be taken from the living entity." What is that eternal function of the soul? It is service. Every living entity serves someone. Even the trees serve others by supplying fruits, flowers, firewood, or shade. The essence of religion is devotional service to God; we may momentarily identify ourselves as Jews,

Hindus, Christians etc. Love of God means unending and uninterrupted service to Him, and that principle is found in all religious traditions.

Chapter Two: THE SOUL'S PURPOSE IN THE MATERIAL WORLD

DEVOTEE: According to Jewish understanding, what is the soul's purpose for being in the material world?

RABBI: Eleazar put the following question to R. Simeon. "Since it is known to God that men will die, why does He send souls down into this world?" He answered, "This question has been discussed many times by the teachers, and they have answered it thus. God sends souls to this world to declare His glory and takes them back afterwards..." [The Zohar II 235a][Prov. V,15]

DEVOTEE: According to the Vedic understanding, the Lord does not actually put us here to declare His glories. Rather, we have fallen into this world because of our envy of the Supreme Lord. However, now that we are here, we may return to the Lord by purifying our consciousness by glorifying the Lord's names, fame, pastimes, paraphernalia, and devotees. There are also a few special souls who are sent here by the Lord to preach His glories for the benefit of mankind. Those devotees are very confidential servants of the Lord and cannot be compared to the ordinary sinful living entities that are forced to suffer in this world. By the influence of those great souls, many others become inspired to glorify the Lord, serve Him, and thus elevate themselves to the transcendental platform.

The material world serves two functions. The first function is to give those souls who want to enjoy their lives separately from the Lord a stage on which they can attempt to act out their fantasies. The second function of this world is to give the souls who have become frustrated with material enjoyment the opportunity to engage in devotional service to God and thus elevate themselves back to the Lord's eternal abode.

RABBI: Many people do not readily obey the laws of God unless they are fearful of the consequences of disobeying those laws. Therefore, the Jewish scriptures emphasize serving God out of fear. Unfortunately, people who resent this approach may reject our religion. What mood of worship do the Vedas embrace?

DEVOTEE: The Vedas also warn us of the severe consequences of disobeying the laws of God. But they also offer a very practical approach, which attracts almost everyone. The karma kanda section of the Vedas deals with offering materialists the means by which they can satisfy their material dreams without further binding themselves to this world. By striving for material enjoyment according to Vedic karma-kanda (fruitive) rituals, a person can gradually elevate himself to the pure platform. Ultimately, the real purpose of the Vedas is to elevate a person back to Godhead. The Bhagavad-gita says, "All purposes served by a small well can at once be served by a great reservoir of water. Similarly, all the purposes of the Vedas can be served to one who knows the purpose behind

them." [Bg. 2.46] All Vedic rituals are meant to lead us to the path of pure devotion. We are safe as long as we do not forget that the ultimate purpose of those rituals is to help us surrender to the Lord.

Chapter Three: GURU AND RABBI

DEVOTEE: In Vedic culture, spiritual knowledge is passed from the guru to his disciples. How is Jewish knowledge preserved and disseminated?

RABBI: In Judaism, knowledge is also passed from the rabbi to his students, but not everyone is qualified to become a student. "As a matter of law, the sages state that these mysteries 'cannot even be taught to a single individual, unless he is wise enough to understand with his own knowledge.' Even in such a case, the complete tradition was only given over to the head of the group, and he would then only instruct those whom he saw fit. Only individuals possessing the highest qualities of scholarship and piety would be admitted to the circle of initiates."

[Introduction to the Bahir, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan]

DEVOTEE: In Vedic culture, although a guru would speak to whoever wanted to learn the Vedic science, he was traditionally very selective whom he would initiate as his disciple. He would only accept those persons who qualified themselves by humble submission and service. Lord Krishna states in the Bhagavad-gita, "Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master, inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized soul can impart knowledge unto you because he has seen the truth." [Bg. 4.34]

RABBI: It is also stated that, "One who reaches the highest level cannot reveal it to anyone. All he can do is give over the keys, so that the enlightened individual can open the gates which are sealed to exclude the unworthy." [Meditation and Kabbalah, p. 79]

DEVOTEE: In Vedic culture, the self-realized guru would distribute the process of devotional service which was so powerful that under his able guidance anyone could purify himself and perfect his life. Still, the ultimate success of the student depended upon his own willingness to follow the process given by the guru.

Chapter Four: A GODLY KING

RABBI: In the Torah, Moses describes to the people some of the requirements of a king. One of the requirements is, "When [the king] is established on his royal throne, he must write a copy of the Torah as a scroll edited by the Levitical priests. [This scroll] must always be with him, and he shall read from it all the days of his life. He will then learn to be in awe of God his Lord, and carefully keep every word of the Torah and these rules. He will then [also] not begin to feel superior to his brethren, and he will not stray from the mandate to the right or

the left. He and his descendants will thus have a long reign in the midst of Israel." [Torah, Duet., Shoftim 17:18] Do the Vedas give any description of the qualities of a king similar to these?

DEVOTEE: The Vedic kings were known as Rajarsis, or saintly kings. The Vedas describe the qualities of a saintly king. A saintly king rules the citizens on behalf of God, his primary goal being to help his citizens gradually elevate themselves on the path of spiritual life. The saintly kings were very learned in the scriptures, and, although very powerful, they always felt themselves to be the insignificant servants of God. One very good example of a saintly king was Dhruva Maharaja who is described in the Srimad Bhagavatam. "Dhruva Maharaja was endowed with all godly qualities; he was very respectful to the devotees of the Supreme Lord and very kind to the poor and innocent, and he protected religious principles. With all these qualifications, he was considered to be the direct father of all the citizens." [Bhag. 4.12.12]

Chapter Five: TRANSLATING SCRIPTURES AND UNDERSTANDING THEIR ESSENCE

DEVOTEE: Rabbi, based on this passage that I will read from the translator's Introduction to the Torah, it appears that due to the complexity of translating the Torah from Hebrew, it must be very difficult for the common Jew to ascertain its true meaning. It says, "Another problem in translating the Torah is that of sentence structure. Clearly, the sentence structure of Hebrew three thousand years ago bears little, if any, resemblance to that of any modern language. Therefore, if one slavishly adheres to the original sentence structure in translating, he will often produce a result very different from that intended by the original. At best, many passages will be difficult, if not impossible, to understand. Moreover, the translator will sometimes have to use many words to translate a single word, while at other times he will have to use a single word to translate many. He will have to add and delete words so that the concept may be clearly expressed in the language into which he is translating."

RABBI: It is true that very few people are qualified to directly translate the Jewish scriptures and to thereby directly ascertain their essence. But since the conclusion of the Torah is to love God, and that does not require any scholarship, even the common people can understand that essence based on bona fide translations and explanations of others.

DEVOTEE: Rabbi, are you telling me that as a Jew, if I actually love God, I will be able to understand the real meaning of the Torah, the Zohar, and the Bahir?

RABBI: Yes that is correct.

DEVOTEE: In Vedic culture, spiritual qualifications of the person translating or explaining transcendental literatures are considered even more important than their scholarship. Most of the Vedic scriptures were originally recorded in

Sanskrit, and in Sanskrit, sometimes a single word can have dozens of meanings according to the context. How then can the translator be sure that he is giving the true meaning? He must understand the essence and goal of all the Vedas, and then naturally he will be able to choose the correct word meanings. In other words, if he is firmly fixed in his understanding, realization and practical application that one must surrender everything to the pure service of the Lord, then he will be able to understand the descriptions that the scriptures give about the Lord, His service, His instructions, etc. To have a pure service attitude towards God means to have pure love for the Lord.

Chapter Six: FREE WILL AND DESTINY

DEVOTEE: Rabbi, what is the extent of our free will, and to what magnitude are our lives controlled by destiny?

RABBI: In the Torah, in his final discourse, Moses said to his people, "See! Today I have set before you [a free choice] between life and good [on one side], and death and evil [on the other]. I have commanded you today to love God your Lord, to walk in His paths, and to keep His commandments, decrees and laws. You will then survive and flourish, and God your Lord will bless you in the land that you are about to occupy. But if your heart turns aside and you do not listen, you will be led astray to bow down to foreign gods and worship them. I am warning you today, that [if you do that] you will be utterly exterminated. You will not last very long in the land which you are crossing the Jordan and coming to occupy. I call heaven and earth as witnesses! Before you I have placed life and death, the blessing and the curse. You must choose life, so that you and your descendants will survive. [You must thus make the choice] to love God your Lord, to obey Him, and to attach yourself to Him. This is your sole means of survival and long life when you dwell in the land that God swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, [promising] that He would give it to them." [Torah, Duet. Netzavim, 30:15-20] In other words, Moses is explaining that God is giving the people the free will to act as they like, but is warning them that if they act wrongly, against the will of the Lord, they will suffer the results of their misdeeds. The people are to that extent the controllers of their destiny.

DEVOTEE: The Vedic understanding is similar. The Supreme Lord directs us what to do and what not to do. If we act against the directions of Lord Krsna, we become fully responsible for the results of our actions. Ignorance of the law is no excuse to be saved from punishment. According to His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, "Without knowing the subtle laws of nature, if we tried to justify all our deeds as influenced by the will of the Personality of Godhead, we would be attempting to bring partiality, inebriety, and gracelessness into the acts of the all-good Personality of Godhead. It should never be imagined that various mundane discrepancies arise by the will of the Personality of

Godhead--that some are happy by His will and others are unhappy by His will. Such differences in the world are due to the proper or improper use of free will enjoyed by the individual living entity." [Message of Godhead]

RABBI: These are very good points. I have personally seen many times, that when a man is in extreme difficulty and does not have a good understanding that his difficulties are ultimately due to his own misdeeds, he loses his faith in God. He may actually become an atheist because he cannot accept that a good and loving God would allow an apparently good person to suffer. Many people give up their religious faiths, including Judaism, due to an imperfect or incomplete understanding of free will and destiny.

DEVOTEE: Yes Rabbi. It is so very important that everyone understands the basic principles of free will and destiny from a theistic perspective. The Vedic understanding of karma and of reincarnation are very important to the theistic understanding of why things happen the way that they do. If we cannot explain free will and destiny theistically, then we will concoct an atheistic philosophy to explain it. To follow an atheistic path ruins our chances to develop love for God and to return to His eternal abode. Karma is an inescapable subtle material law of actions and reactions. For every action that man performs, there will be a perfectly proportionate reaction. Often times the results will come from a previous life's activities and he cannot determine what good or evil he may have done to cause his present life's condition. Ultimately, we should free ourselves from all material reactions by engaging in only those activities that will directly lead us back to God. Such activities are called transcendental and are performed only to please the Lord. Transcendental activities do not bind us to this world but liberate us, whereas material actions, those done against the will of the Lord will certainly bind us to this world of suffering.

Chapter Seven: INTOXICATION AND SEXUAL ENJOYMENT

RABBI: The Jewish scriptures state, "Drink no wine nor strong drink, thou nor thy sons, etc." R. Judah said: 'The fact that this injunction was given to the priests shows that Nadab and Abihu were under the influence of wine.' R. Hiya adduced here the verse: "Wine rejoiceth the heart of man" (Ps. CIV:15). If, he said, the priest is supposed to be joyful more than other men, why is he forbidden wine, which creates joy and smiles? The truth is that wine rejoices at first and saddens afterwards, and the priest must be glad throughout." [Zohar IV:39a] What do the Vedas say regarding the use of intoxication?

DEVOTEE: The use of intoxication was greatly discouraged in Vedic culture and was completely forbidden for the saintly priestly class. According to His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, "The Vaisnavas [devotees of Krsna] are trained to become freed from the four kinds of sinful activities--illicit sex, indulgence in intoxicants, gambling and eating animal foodstuffs. No one

can be on the brahminical platform without having these preliminary qualifications, and without becoming a qualified Brahman, one cannot become a pure devotee." [Bhag. 10.86.59, Purport] Intoxication puts one in the mode of ignorance, and in the mode of ignorance one cannot see things as they are. How then can one act properly if he cannot properly perceive reality, and how can a saintly person give proper guidance if he is unable to understand reality?

RABBI: What do the Vedas say about sexual enjoyment?

DEVOTEE: The whole purpose of Vedic culture is to help everyone in the society to gradually give up all kinds of material enjoyment and to become lovers of God, Krsna. Although sex life is considered one of the highest forms of enjoyment in this world, the Vedas teach gradual detachment from such indulgence to help people to direct their attention toward the higher goal of self-realization. In the four orders of social life, brahmacari, grhastha, vanaprastha, and sannyasa, the only one that allowed any intimate relationship between man and woman is the grhastha ashram. Even within the grhastha ashram sex is allowed between a man and his wife only once a month and then only to conceive children who are to be raised to be God conscious. Any indulgence beyond that constitutes illicit sex and is most detrimental to one's ability to advance on the spiritual path. Definitely, there is no provision permitting either homosexuality or relationships with animals.

RABBI: In the Torah, Moses, repeating the commandments of God, said, "Do not lie with a male as you would with a woman, since this is a disgusting perversion. Do not perform any sexual act with an animal, since it will defile you. A woman shall [likewise] not give herself to an animal and allow it to mate with her. This utterly detestable perversion.... Thus, whenever anyone does any of these disgusting perversions, [all] the people involved shall be cut off [spiritually] from the midst of their people." [Torah, Leviticus, Acharey Moth, 18:22, 23, 29]

DEVOTEE: In the Srimad-Bhagavatam there is a description of the beginning of our present age, Kali-yuga, or the Age of Kali. It is described that the personality of Kali, who is in charge of this degraded age, is the accelerating agent for irreligious principles. He was allowed to reside in those places where there was intoxication, gambling, illicit connection with women, animal slaughter.

Wherever these activities are present, the basic principles of religiosity, namely cleanliness, austerity, truthfulness and mercy, are gradually lost. His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada writes in this regards, "By pride, either artificial or real, the resultant action of austerity is spoiled; by too much affection for female association, cleanliness is spoiled; by too much addiction to intoxication, mercy is spoiled; and by too much lying propaganda, truthfulness is spoiled."

Chapter Eight: BECOMING FEARLESS OF DEATH

DEVOTEE: Rabbi, we both agree that the souls in this world should be using their lives to glorify God. Yet everyone, good or bad, must eventually face death. Since God is all-powerful, it seems that by acting according to His desires we should be able to become free from fear, even the fear of death. Do the Jewish teachings describe different results at the time of death based on our individual life's activities, and can one truly become free from the fear of death?

RABBI: As you have suggested, God takes direct control of the lives of His servants, and thus their death is distinct from and superior to the death of ordinary persons who have not truly dedicated their lives to Him. It is stated, "It is the Destroying Angel who brings death to all people except those who die in the Holy Land, to whom death comes by the Angel of Mercy who holds sway there." But it is not that one really has to die within the holy land to be saved, for it is stated by R. Isaac: "This being the case, wherein lay the superiority of Moses, Aaron and Miriam, concerning whom it is written that they died "by the mouth of the Lord", meaning that their death was not brought about by the Destroying Angel? R. Judah replied: "Truly, the greatness of these three and their superiority over all others is demonstrated by this, that although they met their death outside the Holy Land, they, unlike their contemporaries, were not brought to it by the Destroying Angel, but by the Holy One Himself." [The Zohar IV:151a-151b]

DEVOTEE: There is also a holy place in India known as Vrindavan. This is the place where Lord Krsna appeared approximately 5,000 years ago. One of the characteristics of Vrindavan is that anyone who dies there is liberated and goes back to the eternal spiritual abode of Lord Krsna. But it is not that a person must die in Vrindavan in order to be liberated from the suffering of this world and go back to Godhead. Anyone, in any part of the creation, who always remembers the Lord and engages in His service, becomes eligible to go back to Godhead at the end of this life. In the Bhagavad-gita, Lord Krsna also states, "He quickly becomes righteous and attains lasting peace. O son of Kunti, declare it boldly that My devotee never perishes." [Bg. 9.31] A devotee, as mentioned in this verse, is one whose only interest is the service of the Lord. Also, in the Bhagavad-gita Lord Krsna states, "Engage your mind always in thinking of Me, become My devotee, offer obeisances to Me and worship Me. Being completely absorbed in Me, surely you will come to Me." [Bg. 9.34]

RABBI: That is fascinating. Do the Vedic scriptures make reference to any personality corresponding to the Jewish "Angel of Death" who punishes the sinful after death? Is there any instance in Vedic history when a person was saved from eternal suffering by becoming a devotee of God as indicated in the Bhagavad-gita verses you quoted?

DEVOTEE: Yes! There is a great devotee of the Lord, a demigod (angel), known as Yamaraja. "Yamaraja" literally means "the Lord of Death." As we discussed earlier, the Vedic understanding of demigods is very similar to the Jewish concept of angels. The service that Yamaraja does for Lord Krsna is to judge the

sinful persons and punish them in a way exactly proportionate to the sins they have committed during their life. This punishment is generally very severe, but is never eternal suffering. They are punished so that they will eventually be able to correct themselves of their sinful mentality and develop love of God.

There is a long history in the Sixth Canto of the Srimad-Bhagavatam about Ajamila. Very briefly, the history goes like this. Ajamila had been a very good religious person in his youth, but somehow or other he became attracted to a prostitute. Thus he spent many years living with her, procreating many children and committing all kinds of sinful acts to maintain his household. Finally, when he was about to die he saw the Yamadutas, or the assistants of Yamaraja who are deputed to take all sinful souls to Yamaraja for judgment. Out of great fear upon seeing the Yamadutas, Ajamila cried out to his youngest son who he had named Narayana (a name of God). Immediately, the Vishnudutas (representatives of God) came and opposed the Yamadutas and would not allow them to take Ajamila away for punishment. They said that because Ajamila cried out the holy name of Narayana he had become free from the results of his sins and could not be touched by the Yamadutas. Even at the moment of death if one fully takes shelter of God he will be saved, but we should not risk waiting until that final moment to prepare ourselves.

The tendency is to become bewildered at the moment of death and for the mind to become filled with that which was most dear to us during our life. We must try to make God the most cherished to us during this life and that will make us fearless both within this life and at the moment of death. Even in the case of Ajamila, he was not thinking of God when he called out to Narayana. He was thinking of his dear little son who he had named Narayana. Ajamila was very fortunate that the Yamadutas could not take him to Yamaraja for punishment, but he also could not go back to Godhead at that moment. He was given a longer duration of life, and remembering his life's sinful activities and his encounter with the Yamadutas, he most seriously took to the path of devotion and perfected his life. We should not expect such good fortune if we do not seriously take to the path of spiritual life.

Chapter Nine: THE LORD IN THE HEART

DEVOTEE: Rabbi, many people say that God is in the heart. Do Jews believe in a personal form of God who remains with us within our heart?

RABBI: When the soul is about to descend to this world, it first goes down to the terrestrial Garden of Eden and sees there the glory of the souls of the righteous, and then goes down to Gehinnom and sees the wicked who cry "Woe, woe", and find no compassion. That holy form (God) stands by him until he emerges into the world, after which it keeps him company and grows up with him." [The Zohar 43b] [KI TAZRIA (LEVITICUS)]

DEVOTEE: The Lord says in the Bhagavad-gita "Yet in this body there is another, a transcendental enjoyer, who is the Lord, the supreme proprietor, who exists as the overseer and permitter, and who is known as the Supersoul." [Bg. 13.23] In his explanation of this verse, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada said, "Because the Paramatma is the Supreme Lord, He is present within to sanction the individual soul's desire for material enjoyment. Without the sanction of the Supreme Soul, the individual soul cannot do anything. The individual is bhukta, or the sustained, and the Lord is bhokta, or the maintainer. There are innumerable living entities and He is staying in them as a friend." The Supersoul remains with the living entity, always trying to convince him from within the heart that there is no real happiness in the material world and that real happiness is available only by engaging in devotional service to the Lord. As the individual soul gradually accepts the Lord's advice from within the heart, and from without, from the scriptures and the bona fide guru, he begins to advance toward a blissful, eternal life of knowledge.

Chapter Ten: REINCARNATION

DEVOTEE: Do the Jews believe in reincarnation and the possibility that we can take birth in an animal body?

RABBI: Although not commonly discussed, most Rabbis accept reincarnation (or transmigration of the soul). In the Zohar, R. Simeon says, "that verse Ex. XX, 10 assuredly speaks of the soul of the Righteous One, teaching us that even though she may have to undergo transmigration, even in a manservant, or a maidservant, or an animal, in it thou shall do no manner of work."

DEVOTEE: The Vedas teach of two important concepts in spiritual science-- karma and transmigration of the soul. Karma means that for whatever action we perform, we will suffer or enjoy a proportionate reaction. And reincarnation or transmigration of the soul means that the soul accepts one material body after another according to how one's life is led. The Bhagavad-gita teaches that whatever one is thinking at the time of death will determine the next body. [Bg. 8.6] Therefore, if we have developed an animalistic mentality at the time of death, the soul will accept an animal body just suiting that mentality. If we have been sinful during one lifetime, then we will suffer the reactions to those sins in our next lifetime. That is why some people are born into very nice situations and others are born into extreme difficulty. If we accept that God is all powerful and all good, then without accepting the principle of karma and reincarnation, there is no theistic way to explain why things happen the way they do in this world.

RABBI: Actually, many people give up their faith in Judaism and other religions because they do not understand or agree with that important point.

Chapter Eleven: THE GARDEN OF EDEN AND VRINDAVAN

DEVOTEE: Rabbi, the Vedas clearly and explicitly describe the spiritual world, the eternal abode of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and the activities of the Lord and His devotees there. Do the Jewish scriptures give us any information about the spiritual kingdom of God and what activities take place there?

RABBI: Yes, the Jewish scriptures do describe an eternal place where God takes pleasure in being with righteous souls. R. Simeon says in the Zohar that it is written: "King Solomon made him a palanquin (apiryon) of the trees of Lebanon. He made the pillars thereof of silver, the bottom thereof of gold, the covering of it of purple, the midst thereof being paved with love by the daughters of Jerusalem" [S.S. III:9,10] Apiryon symbolizes the Palace below which is formed in the likeness of the Palace above. This the Holy one, blessed be He, calls 'The Garden of Eden,' for He created it in order to satisfy His own ardent desire for joyous and continual communion with the souls of the righteous who have their abode there-these being those souls who have no bodies in this world. These all ascend and are crowned in that place of perfect delight, and have each their appointed places from whence they can perceive the "loveliness of the Lord", and partake of all the delicious streams of pure balsam (aparsamon). This aparsamon symbolizes the hidden Supernal Palace, whereas apiryon is the Palace below." [Zohar 127a Terumah (Exodus)] In other words, there is a Garden of Eden in the eternal spiritual kingdom of God, and there is also a manifestation of the Garden of Eden that exists within the material world.

DEVOTEE: In the spiritual world, everything is self-effulgent and there is no need for the (*) sun, moon, nor electricity. There is a spiritual world where God and His devotees eternally enjoy together. The highest level of the spiritual realm is the spiritual planet known as Goloka Vrindavan. The spiritual world also exists within this material world. One such place is known as Vrindavan or Gokula Vrindavan. When Lord Krsna comes to this world, He does not come alone, but He brings with Him all of His associates and paraphernalia to perform loving pastimes with His devotees. Those who have become pure devotees of the Lord while in this material world, go back to the spiritual world to be permanently with God. According to Lord Krsna, in the Bhagavad-gita, "After attaining Me, the great souls, who are yogis in devotion, never return to this temporary world, which is full of miseries, because they have attained the highest perfection." [Bg. 18.15]

RABBI: You said that the pure devotees of God engage in intimate loving pastimes with Him. The Jewish scriptures describe a dance that the Lord prepares for the righteous in the hereafter. It is stated, "In the hereafter, the Holy One, blessed be He, will arrange for a dance for the righteous in Gan Eden." [Every Man's Talmud, XI, VI}. Do the Vedas describe any dance arranged by God for the righteous?

DEVOTEE: Yes, there is an intimate dance known as the Rasa-Lila dance performed by the Lord and some of His intimate devotees. I will not go into detail about that dance, but the important point to understand here is that having become perfected souls, or souls who have revived their perfect love for Lord Krsna, they became qualified to associate intimately with the Lord in devotion. In fact, the Lord prefers to associate with His pure devotees in intimate loving relationships rather than to be worshiped in awe and reverence. But that is only for the perfected souls. Until we have perfected our lives, we must worship the Lord with great awe and reverence and strictly follow His laws.

RABBI: In reference to God's desire to associate with the righteous intimately it is described in the Jewish scriptures: "The Holy One, blessed be He, will walk with the righteous in Gan Eden in the Hereafter; and the righteous, on beholding Him, will retreat in terror before Him. But He will call to them, 'See, I am the same as you!'

The above statement is in the Torah, while also emphasizing the need to be extremely reverent and fearful of God. This seems to imply that in both Hinduism and Judaism the righteous, the pure in heart, can look forward to associating intimately with the Lord in the eternal spiritual realm.

DEVOTEE: As we are all pleasure seeking living entities, it is most important to understand that in the spiritual realm there is unlimited pleasure and variety. Otherwise, no one would want to go there. Generally, people think of the spiritual world as being impersonal or void, because they have a very vague idea, at best, of what really goes on there. If we do not understand what goes on in the spiritual world, our tendency may be to consider it similar to this temporary material world which is so full of miseries. Why would anyone want to practice religious or spiritual life seriously if they thought that it would lead them to another situation similar to what we presently experience? Therefore, the Vedas give vivid descriptions of the spiritual world, while teaching us the means by which we can qualify ourselves to return there. One picturesque description of the spiritual world is found in the Brahma-samhita, where it is stated, "I worship Govinda, the primeval Lord, the first progenitor, who is tending the cows, yielding all desires, in abodes built with spiritual gems and surrounded by millions of purpose trees. He is always served with great reverence and affection by hundreds and thousands of goddesses of fortune." [Brahma-samhita 5.29]

RABBI: The Jewish scriptures state, "The virgins without number" are those angelic hosts of whom it is said, "Is there a number to his bands?" [Job. XXV:3] Perhaps this Jewish reference is related to the goddesses of fortune mentioned in the verse you just quoted.

* Also New Testament quote Rev. 22:5.

Chapter Twelve: ISRAEL

DEVOTEE: What is the meaning of the name Israel?

RABBI: This must be one of the most esoteric questions you could ask.

According to the early Kabbalists, the 231 gates are alluded to in the name Israel. In Hebrew, Israel is spelled YisraEl, which literally means, "there are 231." "The Midrash states that at the beginning of creation, 'Israel rose in thought,' The name Israel thus alludes to the fact that creation took place through these 231 gates.

According to the later Kabbalists, those 231 gates are what remained in the Vacated Space that preceded creation." [Sefer Yetzirah 2.4]

DEVOTEE: Your mention of Israel as existing as the vacated space preceding creation is interesting. The Vedas also describe the unmanifested material energy, known in Sanskrit as pradhana. It is from this energy that the whole material creation becomes manifest. You said that at the beginning of creation, "Israel rose in thought". The Vedas describe how everything is manifested from subtle to gross. The subtlest thing in the material creation is the false ego or the material conception of life. In other words, from that original misconception that life comes from matter, and under the influence of the three modes of material nature, the entire gross and subtle elements of the material world become manifest. This is described in the thirteenth chapter of the Bhagavad-gita.

I am also looking at the word Israel from another perspective. Israel, in a broad sense seems to refer to the entire material creation. On that basis, "Israelites" referred to throughout the Torah could, in a broader sense, be referring to much more than the multitudes of people who Moses led out of Egypt by God's order. It could be pertaining to all people in this world because all people are expected to follow the laws of God and to return to God's abode. Regardless of whether one's religion is Jewish, Hinduism, Christianity, etc., he is meant to follow the laws of God. God loves all living entities in this world, not just those who may designate themselves as belonging to a particular religious path. What do you think, Rabbi?

RABBI: Yes, I agree. God's love and mercy are unlimited, and He would certainly not restrict that mercy to a particular group of people. You should be aware that Israel is also another name for the Bride referenced to in the Song of Songs, as well as being the same as the letter He in YHVH.

Chapter Thirteen: THE LORD'S FORMS AND INCARNATIONS

DEVOTEE: The Vedic scriptures give voluminous information about various incarnations of the Lord, describing their names, activities, color, appearance and so on. For example, Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu's future appearance was so described: "When Gargamuni was performing the name-giving ceremony for Krsna and knowing of the future appearance of Lord Caitanya, he predicted, "This boy Krsna has three other colors-white, red, and yellow as He appears in

the different ages. Now He has appeared in a transcendental blackish color." [Cc. Adi 3.35,36] Lord Krsna had previously appeared in the colors of red and white, and He would later appear in the color yellow as Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Are there any similar descriptions in the Jewish scriptures?

RABBI: Yes, although I do not know of any descriptions of the activities of God given in as much detail as you describe from the Vedas, there are some references to His colors. In the Zohar, R. Eleazar says, "It is written, 'And he brought me thither, and behold, there was a man, whose appearance was like the appearance of brass, with a line of flax in his hand, and a measuring reed; [Ezek. XL:3] "Ezekiel saw in this prophetic vision a 'man' but not 'a man clothed in linen.'" [Dan. X:5] For it is only when the angel is on an errand of severity that he is called 'a man clothed in linen'. Otherwise, he assumes various guises, appears in various attire conforming to the message he bears at that time. Now, in the present vision 'his appearance was like the appearance of brass.'

God appeared to Moses and his followers on Mount Sinai in the form a burning bush. According to R. Abba, "When the smoke came out of Mount Sinai a fire ascended enveloped therein, so that its flames were of a blue color. They flared high and dwindled again, and the smoke emitted all the aromas of Paradise, displaying itself in the colors of white, red, and black, as it says..." Perhaps these colors can be related to the same colors of God as mentioned in the Vedas.

DEVOTEE: The Jewish scriptures are very difficult for me to understand with so much written allegorically. The Vedas are very direct and to the point. It is described in the Vedas that although there are many different incarnations of the Lord appearing throughout the ages of universal time, the appearance of Lord Krsna includes within it all the other incarnations.

His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada says, "All the incarnations of the Lord, including the Lord Himself, descend on the different planets of the material world as also in different species of life to fulfil particular missions. Sometimes He comes Himself and sometimes His different plenary portions or parts of the plenary portions or His differentiated portions directly or indirectly empowered by Him, descend on this material world to execute certain specific functions. Originally the Lord is full of all opulences, all prowess, all fame, all beauty, all knowledge and all renunciation. When they are partly manifested through the plenary portions or parts of the plenary portions, it should be noted that certain manifestations of His different powers are required for those particular functions. When in the room small electric bulbs are displayed, it does not mean that the electric powerhouse is limited by the small bulbs. The same powerhouse can supply power to operate large-scale industrial dynamos with greater volts. Similarly, the incarnations of the Lord display limited powers because so much power is needed at that particular time. [Bhag. 1.3.28, Purport]

RABBI: The Torah describes a devastating flood brought by God to destroy the sinful persons of the world who had refused to follow His laws. It is said by God to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me. The world is filled with (man's) crime. I will therefore destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of cypress wood. Divide the ark into compartments. Caulk the inside and outside with pitch and for I Myself am bringing the flood. Water shall be on the earth to destroy from under the heavens all flesh having in it a breath of life. All that is on land will die. But I will keep My pledge that you will come into the ark. You will be together with your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives." [Torah, Genesis, Noah 25:13-18] In the Vedic philosophy are there any descriptions of a devastating flood like this?

DEVOTEE: Yes. According to the Vedas, there was not only one great flood, but there are thousands of them throughout the existence of the universe, they normally start at the beginning of Lord Brahma's night.

RABBI: Do the Vedas describe any personality like Noah being saved from the devastation?

DEVOTEE: The Bhagavat Purana or Srimad-Bhagavatam gives a description of an inundation that occurred many millions of years ago in connection with the Matsya avatar, the Lord's fish incarnation. Briefly, there was a king who was a great devotee of the Supreme Lord, and the Lord chose to show him some special favor. Like Noah, King Satyavrata was forewarned about a universal devastation. In this history, there was also a large boat, which was sent by the Supreme Lord to King Satyavrata. The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: "O King who can subdue your enemies, on the seventh day from today the three worlds-Bhuh, Bhuvah and Svah-will all merge into the water of inundation. When all the three worlds merge into the water, a large boat sent by Me will appear before you. Thereafter, O King, you shall collect all types of herbs and seeds and load them on that great boat. Then, accompanied by the seven sages and surrounded by all kinds of living entities, you shall get aboard that boat, and without moroseness you shall easily travel with your companions on the ocean of inundation, the only illumination being the effulgence of the great sages." [Bhag. 8.24.32-35]

RABBI: We have been discussing many similarities between the Jewish and Hindu theologies. Considering that the passage of time and the development of various cultures can lead to variations in historical accounts, perhaps both of these descriptions refer to the same event. In both accounts, a God conscious personality, accompanied by other spiritually elevated persons, and plants and animals of various species, all take shelter of a large boat or ark to be saved from a great inundation. But I am concerned that these two descriptions appear to have taken place at times in history at least tens of millions of years apart. Do you have any thoughts in that regard?

DEVOTEE: It is quite possible that the Vedic description described in the Srimad Bhagavatam is a different incident than the history of Noah's ark described in the

Torah. As I mentioned earlier, the Vedas give information of innumerable inundations during the existence of the universe. I think that the most important consideration is not whether these two particular histories are exactly the same, but to understand their similar purposes and the way the Lord reciprocates with His devotees. The Lord promised Noah that He would protect Him and the others who boarded the ark. Noah was obviously a very godly person so the Lord was protecting His devotee servant Noah and his family while annihilating the sinful people of the world. Similarly, while the Lord arranged for a gigantic inundation during the time of King Satyavrata, He gave protection to the king and other saintly persons with him. In the Bhagavad-gita, Lord Krsna says, "Whenever and wherever there is a decline in religious practice, O descendant of Bharata, and a predominant rise of irreligion, at that time I descend Myself. To deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants, as well as to reestablish the principles of religion, I Myself appear, millennium after millennium." [Bg. 4.7-8]

RABBI: A few minutes ago, you mentioned something that seemed very unusual. You mentioned a fish incarnation of God called Matsya avatar. Are you suggesting that God appeared as a fish? We discussed earlier that man may take his birth in a lower species of life, but why would God come like that?

DEVOTEE: The Vedas explain that part of the greatness of the Lord is that He is always transcendental. When a soul who has a human body misuses that valuable human form he may take his next birth as an animal. When he has that animal form, he is forced to remain in very low consciousness. On the other hand, when God appears in an animal form, He retains all the unlimited power and abilities of God. He is not reduced in any way. He sometimes appears in an animal form by His own will to perform a particular activity. In the case of the fish incarnation, He appeared to protect King Satyavrata during the great universal inundation since a fish is a naturally expert swimmer. If He so desired, He could have appeared in any form to accomplish the same feat.

RABBI: Although the form of God is not described in the Torah in connection with the great flood, I can understand that He was actually present. It is significant that He chose to give protection to His pure servant, Noah and his family while killing everyone else on earth. God did not need to use a flood to kill all the sinful people. He could have accomplished that within a moment by any means.

DEVOTEE: That is also confirmed by the Lord in the Bhagavad-gita: "All of them as they surrender unto Me I reward accordingly. Everyone follows My path in all respects, O son of Pritha." [Bg. 4.11]

Chapter Fifteen: METATRON AND MAHA-VISHNU

RABBI: It is said that a personality named Metatron cooperates with God to teach the young. While God devotes the last three hours of the day to this work,

Metatron is in charge during the remainder of the day. (A.Z. 3b) [Everyman's Talmud, II, III] Do the Vedas give any information about such a personality? DEVOTEE: The Vedas inform us of one plenary expansion of Lord Krsna named Maha-Vishnu. In the creative process, it is from Maha-Vishnu that all of the universes emanate, and within those universes the living entities, like us, are struggling for existence. The purpose of this world is ultimately to help the envious living entities to become detached from the desire for material enjoyment and to revive their love for God. Through His creative functions, Maha-Vishnu actually teaches the "young" detachment from material life and attachment towards the Lord's loving devotional service.

RABBI: I do not understand. According to the Vedas, can you explain further how exactly is it that Maha-Vishnu is cooperating with God to teach the young?

DEVOTEE: As we had discussed before, the Vedas clearly teach that we are not the material body but the soul within. Young and old in this connection have nothing to do with the age of the body, because the soul is eternal and unchanging. "The young" refers to almost all living entities in the material world in any species of life. We are considered young in realization of God until we have developed love for God. Maha-Vishnu helps to teach the "young" to become detached from the desire to enjoy this world separately from the Lord's service, and to simultaneously help them to revive their love for Lord Krsna. He does this by creating all the material universes, within which the living entities are struggling hard for material existence. As we struggle in ignorance to find some enjoyment, we gradually become frustrated. In our frustration we naturally become a little detached from material existence, and the Lord in the heart, an expansion of Maha-Vishnu known as Ksirodakasayi Vishnu, directs us from within to search out a bona fide guru. The guru then teaches his submissive disciples the spiritual process to revive their natural love for God. In this way, Maha-Vishnu cooperates with the God (Lord Krsna) to teach the young.

Actually, Maha-Vishnu is another form of God, but whereas the original Personality of Godhead, Lord Krsna, spends His time enjoying with His pure devotees in the spiritual world, so His expansions like Maha-Vishnu, work directly to help the living entities to develop detachment from material enjoyment and attachment to Lord Krsna. Those forms of Vishnu known as the Purusa incarnations, namely Maha-Vishnu, Garbhodakasayi Vishnu, and Ksirodakasayi Vishnu, all function within this world to teach the young and spiritually immature to mature in their realization of God. There is really no difference between these three forms of Vishnu except the functions they perform and the way that they may change Their forms to perform those functions.

RABBI: Your explanation of Maha-Vishnu and His expansions is interesting. This seems to corroborate a statement found about Metatron in Origins of the Kabbalah where it is said, "Metatron is therefore not a proper name at all but a designation for the whole category of celestial powers performing a mission." [Origins of the Kabbalah, III, 6]

Chapter Sixteen: A FLAMING SWORD AND THE SUDARSHAN CAKRA

DEVOTEE: The Vedas inform us of the Sudarshan Cakra, a manifestation of the Lord's spiritual potency which acts in different capacities according to the Lord's desire. Generally the Sudarshan Cakra appears as a weapon like a discus with a razor sharp edge that may also exhibit intolerable heat. In his prayers to the Sudarshan Cakra, Ambarisa Maharaja said, "O master of speech, by your effulgence, full of religious principles, the darkness of the world is dissipated, and the knowledge of learned persons or great souls is manifested. Indeed, no one can surpass your effulgence, for all things, manifested and unmanifested, gross and subtle, superior and inferior, are but various forms of you that are manifested by your effulgence. [Bhag. 9.5.7] One of the functions of the Sudarshan Cakra is to chastise the demons, but another is to uplift the consciousness of the living beings. Do the Jewish scriptures give any information about a weapon of the nature of Sudarshan Cakra?

RABBI: There is one verse in the Torah, after God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. It is said, "He drove away the man, and stationed the cherubim (angel of destruction) at the east of Eden, along with the revolving sword blade, to guard the path of the Tree of Life." [Torah, Genesis, Bereshith 3:24] "Man is told that he must eventually die and is banished from paradise. He can only return to paradise after death, and before doing so, he must pass by these angels of purgatory (Bachya). The prophet must also pass these angels to approach the Tree of Life." [Torah, Note 3:24]

Regarding the revolving sword or flaming sword that revolves, it is said "the manner in which the sword rotates depends on the readiness of the individual attempting to enter. If he is worthy, it becomes the mirror through which he perceives, while if he is not worthy, he is burned out and cut off by the fire of this sword. The one who oversees the sword, preventing the unworthy from entering, is the angel Metatron." [Meditation and Kabbalah p. 80 Chapter 4, Teachings of Rabbi Abraham Abulafia]

DEVOTEE: There is a long history in the Vedas in which the Sudarshan Cakra functioned both to punish a demon and to ultimately enlighten him. Very briefly, one day, the great mystic Brahman Durvasa Muni came to visit Ambarisa Maharaja at his palace. The king was eager to serve Durvasa royally. While Durvasa took his bath, the king, not wanting to eat before his guest, but obligated to break his religious fast, took only a little water. Durvasa understood that Ambarisa Maharaja had drunk water and felt unlimitedly offended that the king had eaten before him. Due to extreme anger, Durvasa created a fiery demon to kill the king, but the Lord's Sudarshan Cakra immediately came and killed the demon. Then, the cakra started chasing Durvasa Muni all over the universe until finally the sage approached the Supreme Lord Himself for protection. The Lord

refused him protection and sent him back to Ambarisa Maharaja to seek forgiveness for his offenses to the king. At the humble request of the king, the Sudarshan Cakra ceased pursuing Durvasa. After this incident, Ambarisa Maharaja sumptuously fed Durvasa Muni and they became very good friends. By the grace of the Sudarshan Cakra, Durvasa Muni was enlightened as to the exalted spiritual position of the king. Thus, the Sudarshan Cakra simultaneously punished Durvasa and enlightened him.

RABBI: Do the Vedas describe any other functions of the Sudarshan Cakra?

DEVOTEE: It is also said, "You [Sudarshan Cakra] are the original vision of the Lord, and therefore you are known as Sudarshan. Everything has been created by your activities, and therefore you are all-pervading." In his explanation to this verse, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada says, "The word Sudarshan means auspicious vision. From Vedic instructions we understand that this material world is created by the glance of the Supreme Personality of Godhead (sa aiksata, sa asrjata). The Supreme Personality of Godhead glanced over the mahat-tattva, or the total material energy, and when it was agitated, everything came into existence. Western philosophers sometimes think that the original cause of creation was a chunk that exploded. If one thinks of this chunk as the total material energy, the mahat-tattva, one can understand that the chunk was agitated by the glance of the Lord, and thus the Lord's glance is the original cause of material creation." [Bhag. 9.5.5, Purport]

RABBI: There is a statement in the Zohar that "When God was about to create the world, He produced a secret spark from which there issued and radiated all the lights, which constitute the upper world. Then it continued its radiation, and the Artificer made it into a light without brightness, and thus He made the lower world. [Zohar II:156b]

DEVOTEE: After Durvasa Muni begged forgiveness from Ambarisa Maharaja, the king offered prayers to Sudarshan Cakra. He said, "O master of speech, by your effulgence, full of religious principles, the darkness of the world is dissipated, and the knowledge of learned persons or great souls is manifested. Indeed, no one can surpass your effulgence, for all things, manifested and unmanifested, gross and subtle, superior and inferior, are but various forms of you that are manifested by your effulgence." In his explanation, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada said, "Without illumination, nothing can be seen, especially in this material world. The illumination in this world emanates from the effulgence of Sudarshan, the original vision of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The illuminating principles of the sun, the moon and fire emanate from Sudarshan. Similarly, illumination by knowledge also comes from Sudarshan." [Bhag. 9.5.7, Purport]

Chapter Seventeen: THE LORD'S BODILY (BRAHMAN) EFFULGENCE

DEVOTEE: Rabbi, earlier we discussed that God has an eternal personal identity. But the Vedas also speak of an impersonal aspect of God, which is actually the effulgence from His body. That effulgence, the brahmajyoti, is ultimately the source of all illumination. The brahmajyoti diffuses light from the transcendental body of the Lord, and the same light is reflected in many varieties: the light of the sun, the light of the moon, the light of fire, or the light of electricity. [Bhag. 2.9.34, Purport] Do the Jewish scriptures give any information of effulgence coming from God and how it illuminates everything?

RABBI: There is one verse in the Zohar: "The Most Recondite is beyond cognition, but reveals of Himself a tenuous and veiled brightness shining only along a narrow path which extends from Him, and this is the brightness that irradiates all. This is the starting point of all esoteric mysteries, itself being unknowable." [Zohar IV:146b]

DEVOTEE: The verse you just quoted from the Zohar indicates that there is a higher understanding of God than "the brightness that irradiates all." The Vedas emphatically conclude the same. "The Absolute Truth (God) is realized in three phases of understanding by the knower of the Absolute Truth, and all of them are identical. Such phases of the Absolute Truth are expressed as Brahman, Paramatma, and Bhagavan." [Bhag. 1.2.11] Brahman refers to the impersonal all-pervasive spirit. That is the same as the brahmajyoti, the effulgence of the Lord. Paramatma realization means to realize the localized aspect of the Lord as He is situated in the heart of every living being. And the highest realization of the Absolute Truth is Bhagavan, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Who is full in all opulences.

RABBI: I am a little confused of your explanation a few moments ago. You told me that according to the Vedic version, the brahmajyoti was the source of illumination for the sun, the moon and fire. But previously you said that the Sudarshan Cakra was the illuminating principles of the sun, the moon and fire. Why do the Vedas give such contradictory information?

DEVOTEE: There is no contradiction at all, for since the Lord is Absolute, all apparent contradictions can be rectified within Him. Sudarshan is the glance of the Lord, and the brahmajyoti is the effulgence of the Lord. The Lord has the ability to perform any function with any part of His body. According to the Brahma-samhita, the body of the Supreme Personality of Godhead can enjoy anything and do everything with any of His limbs. On the absolute platform, the Lord's name, fame, form, pastimes, effulgence and glance are all on an equal level. Just like when we chant the Lord's names, He is present with all of His potencies. When we speak about His pastimes and activities, He is also present with all of His potencies. Similarly, the effulgence of the Lord or the glance of the Lord contains all of His potencies and thus both can perform the same functions. Since we only have experience within the material atmosphere, it is difficult to comprehend spiritual principles that are fully outside of our experience.

Chapter Eighteen: The Oral and Written Traditions of the Torah and the Vedas Or The Black and White Hidden Mysteries of the Torah and Vedas

DEVOTEE: The Vedas have an oral and a written tradition. Originally they were handed down from guru to disciple orally. Five thousand years ago the Vedas were compiled by Srila Vyasadeva in Sanskrit for the benefit of mankind. Do the Jewish scriptures also have oral and written traditions?

RABBI: Yes. There are both oral and written traditions of the Torah. First it existed in oral form and later as the written Torah. It is said, "It [the written Torah] is explicitly mentioned in section 99 [of the Bahir] as the light that nourishes the lamp of the oral Torah: "Such is the oral Torah: although it is a lamp it has need of the written Torah in order to resolve its difficulties and explain its mysteries." [Origins of the Kabbalah, p. 145] Were the written Vedas required to help understand the oral tradition?

DEVOTEE: In this age, Kali-yuga, people are generally less intelligent than in previous ages. That is why Srila Vyasadeva gave us the Vedas in written form about five thousand years ago. He divided the Vedas into sections and expanded on them so that they would be easier to understand. In former ages, people in general had keen memories, having heard the Vedic instructions once from their spiritual master, they would perfectly understand and remember them for the rest of their lives. There was no need for written words.

RABBI: It is said, "And thus the written Torah cannot adopt corporeal form, except through the power of the oral Torah: that is, that the former cannot be truly understood without the latter, just as the mode of divine Mercy can only be grasped and perceived through the mode of Judgment." [Origins of the Kabbalah, p. 288]

DEVOTEE: This verse seems to say that one cannot understand the written Torah without the help of the oral Torah. Yet a few minutes ago, you quoted a verse that seemed to indicate the opposite - that to understand the mysteries of the oral Torah, one must take the help of the written Torah. Can you explain this apparent contradiction?

RABBI: As I understand it, the written Torah is required to fully understand the oral Torah, another aspect of the oral Torah is the rabbi's personal teachings, using the written Torah as a guide, the realized rabbi teaches the qualified student its inner meanings. This is especially important when the rabbi is teaching not only the part of the Torah known to the Christians as the Old Testament, but especially the more complex expanded body of Jewish religious law, including the Bahir, the Talmud, the Zohar, and the Sefer Yetzirah. The Zohar itself is composed of innumerable discourses, which expand on the verses of the Torah. In this way, the oral tradition is continuing and assisting in the understanding of

the written Torah, and with that understanding there is no contradiction at all between the two verses I have quoted.

DEVOTEE: Thank you for your explanation, Rabbi. Exactly the same principle holds true regarding the Vedas. By including the bona fide commentaries on the already existing Vedas, the Vedas are being expanded. Veda means knowledge. As Srila Vyasadeva has divided and expanded the original Vedas to make them easier to understand, the various representatives of Srila Vyasadeva are also writing commentaries on his works, toward the same end. The most recent representative of Srila Vyasadeva is His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, whose translations and commentaries on the Vedas I have quoted many times in our discussions.

RABBI: It is said, "First, God took two names. The first became the great fire or the sefirah geburah, while the other unfolded to become the 'form of the written Torah, which is the color of white fire.' It corresponds to the sefirah of the divine Mercy, or tifereth. The lowest sefirah, on the other hand, contains, by virtue of its correspondence to the action of divine judgment in the world, the oral Torah, which is black fire burning upon an underlayer of white fire." [Origins of the Kabbalah, p. 288] Is there anything in the Vedas that seems to correspond with this statement?

DEVOTEE: According to the Vedas, the original name of God is Krsna, and the name of His first expansion is Balarama. Lord Krsna appears blackish in color (and is the hidden secret of the Vedas), and Lord Balarama appears whitish. Lord Balarama is known as the original spiritual master (one who reveals the hidden knowledge of God), as is Srila Vyasadeva who compiled the Vedic literatures. It is with the help of Lord Balarama or Srila Vyasadeva, or their bona fide representatives that the Vedas can be understood. It was Srila Vyasadeva who actually compiled the Vedas in written form, and he is ultimately a representative of Lord Balarama who is the source of the Vedic oral tradition.

Chapter Nineteen: GOD'S FORM AND BEAUTY

DEVOTEE: Lord Krsna is always described as being eternally youthful, with beautiful wavy black hair. Is there a similar description of God in the Jewish scriptures?

RABBI: The Jewish scriptures describe a similar vision of God. "His head is a treasure of fine gold. His locks are hanging, black like the raven." In both Talmudic and Kabbalistic traditions, one of the interpretations is that it relates to a vision of God; "when He is visualized in battle, He is seen as a young man with black hair." [Sefer Yetzirah 6.1]

DEVOTEE: The Vedas also refer to the form of the Lord. In the Srimad-Bhagavatam it is stated, "the Lord is super excellently beautiful on account of His open and merciful smile and His sidelong glance upon His devotees. His black

hair is curly, and His garments, waving in the wind, appear like flying saffron pollen from lotus flowers. His glittering earrings, shining helmet, bangles, garland, ankle bells, waist belt and various other bodily ornaments combine with the conch shell, disc, club, and lotus flower to increase the natural beauty of the Kaustubha pearl on His chest." [Bhag. 2.24.47-48] Do the Jewish scriptures make any more references to the form or appearance of God?

RABBI: In the Torah, it is described that when Moses submitted his pleas to God, "Please let me have a vision of Your Glory", God replied, "I will make all My good pass before you, and reveal the Divine Name in your presence. [But still,] I will have mercy and kindness to whomever I desire. You cannot have a vision of My Presence. A man cannot have a vision of Me and still exist." [Torah, Exodus, Ki Thisa 33:18-20] In other words, God is saying that no living creature can see Him. [Torah, Note 33:20]

DEVOTEE: Similarly, in the Vedas, the form of God is clearly described, but it is also stated that unless God reveals Himself to someone, they cannot see Him. The Brahma-samhita states that without one's eyes being anointed with pure love of God, he cannot see Lord Krsna everywhere. No one can force the Lord to reveal Himself, but simply by loving the Lord, He will reveal Himself to us as He is. According to the Vedas, even within this life, we can see the Lord if we qualify ourselves by loving God. We must simply change our consciousness from material to spiritual.

Chapter Twenty: DIRECT AND INDIRECT FEMALE EXPANSIONS OF GOD'S ENERGY

DEVOTEE: The Vedas describe one expansion, Durga, who is the female personification of the material energy. She appears as the wife of Lord Shiva and performs her duties in cooperation with him. Do the Jewish scriptures describe any similar female expansions of God's energy?

RABBI: The most primary male female relationship, which is possible, is that which exists between the Creator and the creation. This is the cause and effect relationship. Cause is Keter, while effect is Malkhut. [Sefer Yetzirah 1.13]

DEVOTEE: The Vedas describe that the Lord is the supreme male personality and the material energy (Durga) is female. The Lord impregnates all of the living entities into the material nature, giving them suitable material bodies according to their previous activities. It is said, "The total material substance, called Brahman, is the source of birth, and it is that Brahman that I impregnate, making possible the births of all living beings, O son of Bharata." [Bg. 14.3]

RABBI: "It is said that Malkhut-kingship, the bride (of God), is also seen as lying with her head to the East. Therefore her womb is to the West, and it is in this womb that all seed is "mixed together." Malkhut-kingship is therefore called Aravot, which has the double connotation of 'west' and 'mixture.' [Bahir 2.56]

DEVOTEE: The Vedas greatly emphasize the importance of chanting the Holy Names of the Lord, especially the Hare Krsna mantra: Hare Krsna Hare Krsna Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. In this prayer, the devotee is calling out to both the Supreme Lord Krsna and Lord Rama as well as to the Lord's female pleasure expansion known as Hare, or Radha. In the Jewish tradition, is there a similar holy name or prayer that represents both the male and female aspects of the Supreme?

RABBI: It is stated, "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; keep not silence at my tears" (Ps. XXXIX:13) "Why", he asked, "is the word for "hear" in this place written shim'ah instead of the usual sh'ma? The truth is that the form sh'ma is always addressed to the male aspect of the Deity, whereas the form shim'ah is addressed to the female aspect.

DEVOTEE: The Vedas describe the ghastly form of Goddess Kali, another name for the Goddess Durga. There is a reference of Goddess Kali in the Srimad-Bhagavatam in the history of the Supreme Lord's devotee, Jada Bharata, when she manifested herself to protect him. It is stated, "Intolerant of the offenses committed, the infuriated goddess Kali flashed her eyes and displayed her fierce, curved teeth. Her reddish eyes glowed, and she displayed her fearsome features. She assumed a frightening body, as if she were prepared to destroy the entire creation. Leaping violently from the altar, she immediately decapitated all the rogues and thieves with the very sword with which they had intended to kill Jada Bharata. She then began to drink the hot blood that flowed from the necks of the beheaded rogues and thieves, as if this blood were liquor. Indeed, she drank this intoxicant with her associates, who were witches and female demons. Becoming intoxicated with this blood, they all began to sing very loudly and dance as though prepared to annihilate the entire universe. At the same time, they began to play with the heads of the rogues and thieves, tossing them about as if they were balls." [Bhag. 5.9.18] Do the Jewish scriptures describe anything like this?

RABBI: There is a description that resembles this one. It is stated, "He summoned to issue from the side of Darkness a kind of female moon, which rules over the night, and is associated with Adonai, the Lord of all the earth. In his days, the moon was magnified and reached her fullness. A thousand mountains rose before her, and she blew them away with a puff. A thousand mighty rivers flowed before her, and she swallowed them at a draught. Her nails reached out in a thousand and seventy directions and her hands in twenty-four thousand, so that nothing could escape her. Thousands of bucklers clung to her hair. From between her feet went forth a youth who stretched from one end of the world to the other with sixty clubs of fire..." [Zohar]

Chapter Twenty-one: DEMIGODS AND ANGELS

DEVOTEE: Rabbi, most religions understand "God" as the Supreme Almighty who is second to none. Yet, virtually every religious culture in the world knows of special beings beyond the earthly realm who have control over the planets, the rain, food production, etc., and from whom human beings seek benedictions or protection. In the Jewish teachings, are there such beings mentioned and what role do they play?

RABBI: In the Jewish teachings these personalities are known as angels and many of them have particular controlling functions over the world. The Midrash teaches, "There is no blade of grass that does not have a constellation (Mazal) over it, telling it to grow." [Sefer Yetzilah 4.6] "As commentaries explain, 'God's providence works through the angels, but the angels, in turn, work through the stars and planets. As some authorities put it, the angels are, in a sense, like souls to the stars. Thus, for example, some sources speak of the stars as having intelligence, but the commentaries note that this is actually speaking of the angels that are associated with them.'" [Sefer Yetzilah 4.6]

DEVOTEE: I am very interested in this statement from the Midrash. In Vedic philosophy, we find practically the same explanation. As we generally say, not a blade of grass moves without the will of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Thus everything is moving under His will: by His will everything is being created, everything is being maintained, and everything is being annihilated. Still He is aloof from everything, as the sky is always aloof from the activities of the wind.

In the Upanisads, it is stated, "It is out of the fear of the Supreme Lord that the wind is blowing." [Taittiriya Upanisad 2.8.1] It is also stated, "etasya va aksarasya prasasane gargi surya-candramasau vidhrtau tisthata etasya va aksarasya prasasane gargi dyav-aprthivyau vidhrtau tisthatah. By the supreme order, under the superintendence of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the Moon, the Sun, and the other great planets are moving." [Bṛhad-aranyaka Upanisad 3.8.9]

RABBI: The Sefer Yetzilah refers to two kinds of angels: those who are permanent and those who are temporary. It is said that only the permanent ones, such as Gabriel and Michael, have names. The temporary ones do not. [Sefer Yetzilah 4.6] Do the Vedic literatures describe different kinds of demigods?

DEVOTEE: Yes. In one sense, all of the inhabitants of the higher planets of the universe are called demigods in the same way that all men, women and children on earth are called human beings. Also, it is stated that there is life on all the planets in this universe, and that each heavenly planet is inhabited by different kinds of demigods. But also, there are many specially empowered demigods who are devotees of God and who the Lord has engaged in His service to help manage the affairs of the universe. Many of them are in charge of their own planets, including the planets of our solar system.

I do not know of a special class of demigods who are permanent or eternal, but the controlling demigods, although not eternal themselves, function within

various posts that exist as long as the universe exists. For example, one of the principle demigods is Lord Indra. Indra is the name of the post, but the particular demigod who occupies that post during a given period has his own personal name. Just like President of the United States is a post, but there have been many presidents throughout American history.

Chapter Twenty-two: CHANTING THE HOLY NAMES OF THE LORD

DEVOTEE: When I see the solemn Rabbis davening, it is hard to imagine that they are searching for the same ecstasy from love of God that a Hindu is trying to achieve during a bhajan or kirtana.

RABBI: Our natural love for God (EL KNA) must be revived. Therefore, it is written, "And ye who cleave to the Lord your God, ye are alive today." [] R. Simeon further said: "In all things there is "drawing near" for him who understands how to accomplish the union and to worship the Lord, for when the sacrifice is offered in the manner due, all grades are brought near as one unity, and the light of Countenance is present in the world, in the Sanctuary, and the "other side is the subdued..." [Zohar]

"When the dawn brightens and he recites his prayers, and unifies the Holy Name in the manner due, he is encircled with a thread of grace; he looks into the firmament, and a light of holy knowledge rests upon him. As the man is thus adorned and shrouded with light all things tremble before him, for he is called the son of the Holy One...the Lord is nigh to all who call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth." [Zohar 57a] [Ps. CXLV:18]

Therefore, it has been taught that a priest who knows not how to unify thus the Holy Name can not perform proper service, for on the achievement of that unity hangs both celestial and terrestrial worship. The priest must, therefore, strive to concentrate heart and mind on the attainment of this unification, so that those above and those below may be blessed. [Zohar III.57a] [2 Sam. VIII:23]

DEVOTEE: Certainly, the Vedas also highly recommend the regular praising of the Lord's holy names. In fact, in this present age, called Kali-yuga, the chanting of God's names is the method recommended by Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu for people in general to realize God. It is said, "harer nama harer nama harer namaiva kevalam kalau nasty eva nasty eva nasty eva gatih anyatha "In the age of Kali, the present age of materialism and quarrel, there is no alternative, there is no alternative, there is no alternative for making positive spiritual advancement but the chanting of the holy name, the holy name, the holy name of the Lord." [Brhad Naradiya Purana]

While anyone can chant the holy names of the Lord, in order to receive the full benefit of the chanting, pure love for God, one must chant without offense. When we are chanting the holy names, we are praying to the Lord to be engaged in His service. Offenseless chanting therefore means that our heart is so pure that we

have no other motivation for chanting the holy names than to serve the Lord. We must unify our desire with the desire of the Lord. The chanting of the Lord's holy names is both the means and the end of the process, which is to revive our dormant love for God.

RABBI: It is amazing how similar the Jewish teachings are to the Vedic version. Although Jews may not chant Krsna, the principle is the same, to perfect our lives by prayer.

DEVOTEE: Rabbi, the Vedas explain that one may experience great ecstasy by properly chanting the Lord's holy names. In the Jewish religion, does perfect chanting of the holy names (prayer) also allow one to experience spiritual ecstasy and if so, what are the symptoms of one who is experiencing such joyful ecstasy?

RABBI: People who have dedicated their lives to the service of God may at times feel unlimited joy or ecstasy while engaged in prayer. It is said, "Permute the letters back and forth, and in this manner, you will reach the first level. As a result of the activity and your concentration on the letters, your mind will become bound to them. The hairs on your head will stand on end and tremble. Your lifeblood is in your heart, and regarding this it is written, "the blood is the soul" [Deuteronomy 12:23]. It is likewise written, "The blood in the soul will atone" [Leviticus 17:11]. This blood within you will begin to vibrate because of the permutations that loosen it. Your entire body will then begin to tremble, and all your limbs will be seized with shuddering. You will experience the terror of God and will be enveloped with fear of Him. You will then feel as if an additional spirit is within you, arousing you and strengthening you, passing through your entire body and giving you leisure. It will seem as you have been anointed with perfumed oil, from head to foot. You will rejoice and have great pleasure. You will experience ecstasy and trembling--ecstasy for the soul, and trembling for the body. [Meditation and Kabbalah, Treasury of the Hidden Eden p. 85-86]

DEVOTEE: The stage of bhava, love of God, is manifested by eight transcendental symptoms, namely inertness, perspiration, standing of hairs on end, failing in the voice, trembling, paleness of the body, tears in the eyes, and finally trance. Sometimes, materialist devotees of the Lord imitate these symptoms. But it is easy to understand that they are pretenders because it will be found that they are still addicted to all kinds of forbidden activities like smoking, drinking, or illegitimate sex with women. [Bhag. 2.3.24, Purport]

Chapter Twenty-three: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GOD'S NAMES

DEVOTEE: Rabbi, in the Vedas, Krsna is one name of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. In the Jewish tradition, is there a similar name?

RABBI: Yes. The name of God, which is most similar to Krsna, is El KNA. In Judaism, an example would be the name of Rabbi Nehuniah ben HaKana. The name HaKana is one of the combinations of the forty-two names of God. Its

formation is almost identical with the name YHVA (Jehovah). YHVA is made up of four Hebrew letters - Yod He VA He. Yod and Va are considered to be names of God. The He represents the primal female principle who is referred to as the Shekinah, My beloved. Kana is the male principle and its root is in the name of God EL KANA.

DEVOTEE: In the Hare Krsna mantra, Hare is the vocative form of the word Hara that represents the energy of God, which is feminine. So it seems very significant that in both the Jewish and the Vedic traditions, God is not alone but is always with His female pleasure energy. The word Hara is a form of addressing the energy of the Lord, and the words Krsna and Rama are personal forms of addressing God Himself.

In a conversation with a Benedictine monk in Germany in 1974, our spiritual master, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, discussed the similarity between the names Krsna and Christ. He pointed out that the Greek word Kristos means Christ or "the anointed one".

RABBI: Kana (KNA) is also the name one should meditate on during morning meditation, Mondays. The significance being that on Monday the heavens and Earth were created. God as the Supreme Creator is the King of His creation and the name KNA refers to the Supreme King, God.

DEVOTEE: This is very interesting, because the name Kana is an intimate name for Lord Krishna in the Vedic literature.

RABBI: This is considered to be the most intimate name for God in the Old Testament. Where it is translated, "I am a jealous God, have no other gods before you", the literal Hebrew translation is, "My name is EL KNA, have no other gods before you."

The Greek word Krista is a derivation of KNA, and in English the word Christ is the best-known example of the inner meanings of the name. The Son of God, taking His Father's name, as His last name.

On Monday you must intertwine the associated name "KRE ShTN" as explained by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan in Meditation and the Kabbalah.

DEVOTEE: Jesus said to glorify the holy name of God and that name is Christ or, by a different pronunciation, Krsna. The essential principle is to glorify and chant the holy names of God.

Chapter Twenty-four: BALARAMA AND BALAM

DEVOTEE: Rabbi, in the Vedas, Lord Balarama is known as the first expansion of God. In the Jewish teachings do you know of any names corresponding to this?

RABBI: This name can be found in the name of the founder of the Kabbalist movement, the Rabbi Balsham Tov. Balsham means the "master of the Holy Name." On examination of Balsham, we find the name Bal that is a shortened

form of Balam, the second expansion of God's personal energy, and Sham, which means all of God's Names are one. The personality or aspect of God represented by the name Va (in YHVH) is the same as God's second expansion, Balam. Balam is also the source of binah or understanding that knowledge by which God reveals Himself and His spiritual creation.

DEVOTEE: Rabbi, can you further explain the Jewish meaning of Balam?

RABBI: This word occurs only once in scripture in the verse, "He stretches the north on Chaos, He hangs the Earth on Nothingness." [Job 26:7] According to many commentaries, the word Beli, meaning without, and mah, meaning what or anything. The word Beli-mah would then mean without anything, or nothingness. Other sources state that Belimah comes from the root Balam, meaning to bridle. Similarly, the Biblical verse, "He hangs the earth on the ineffable", would mean that the forces that uphold creation cannot be described. A leading Kabbalist, Rabbi Issac of Acco (1250-1340) points out that belimah has a numerical value of 87 whereas God's name Elohim has a value of 86. Belimah therefore represents the stage immediately following the pure essence of the Divine. [Sefer Yetzirah 1.2]

DEVOTEE: According to the Vedas, Lord Balarama, in His expansion of Ananta Sesa, holds up all of the planets of the universe. Generally planetary positions are attributed to the laws of gravity. But it is actually all made possible by an expansion of Lord Balarama's energy. Additionally, Lord Balarama is known as the original guru or giver of knowledge, and Lord Brahma (the first created person in the universe) is the original recipient of knowledge from God in the material world. Is there a similar first person in Jewish history?

RABBI: As I understand, Brahma is said to have four heads. There is an obscure reference to a four-headed angel in the Talmud. It is said, "Angels are supposed to have no back and four faces, so always to be able to behold God." [Talmud, cf. Ezek I:6] Also, many rabbis say that an ancient Abraham, with secondary creative power like Brahma is being referred to when speaking of Brahma. * Ref. Verse Abraham from Zohar

DEVOTEE: In the Bhagavad-gita, Lord Krsna states, "Of letters I am the letter A, and among compound words I am the dual compound. I am also inexhaustible time, and of creators I am Brahma." [Bg. 10.33] In the Jewish teachings, is there anywhere that God is represented by the letter A?

RABBI: According to the Kabbalist, the letter Aleph denotes Keter (crown), the highest of the Sefirot. The Kabbalists call Keter the level of Nothingness (Ayin-). It is on this level that the laws of nature cease to exist, and can therefore be altered. [Sefer Yetzirah 1.1]

DEVOTEE: Rabbi, in the First Canto of the Srimad-Bhagavatam, there is a long description of how Lord Brahma created the planets, stars, and bodies of all living entities within this universe. Until he executed the creative process, there was no order, only chaos.

The material energy existed but was unmanifest. Can you tell me more about the original Abraham and how he may be connected with the creation?

RABBI: Yes. The original Abraham has practically the same function and the same name as Lord Brahma. For example, in Hebrew, Abraham is pronounced A-brahma-m. Furthermore, there is a description of how the universe was in chaos until Abraham appeared. It is said, "Over the whole, there hovered Tohu (chaos) and as long as Tohu dominated, the whole world was not in being or existence. When did that key open the gates and make the world fruitful? It was when Abraham appeared." [Genesis II:4]

Chapter Twenty-five: VEDIC AND JEWISH CALENDARS AND THE END OF THIS AGE

DEVOTEE: What year is this according to the present Hebrew calendar?

RABBI: "The current Hebrew year is 5,757. In this calendar, the year in which Adam was created is counted as year one. If we then count the Biblical genealogies from the time of Adam, we find that over 5,000 years have elapsed since the time he was formed. However, the Kabbalists clearly say that other human beings existed before Adam, and this is even supported in scripture. [Drush Or HaChaim] The fifth cycle was the one that brought life, and this took place around two and a half billion years ago. Around 974 generations before Adam, or some 25,000 years ago, man developed all of the physical and mental capabilities that we possess today...but he still lacked the divine soul that would make him a spiritual being. God then created Adam, the first true human being with a soul, 'and He blew in his nostrils a soul of life'. [Genesis 2:7] [Sefer Yetzirah 4.15]

DEVOTEE: The Vedic calendar starts dating from the beginning of this Kali-yuga. Kali-yuga lasts 432,000 years, out of which we have passed about 5,000 years since the Battle of Kuruksetra and the end of the regime of King Pariksit. So there are 427,000 years remaining of this age. At the end of the age of Kali begins another cycle of four ages, namely Satya-yuga, Treta-yuga, Dvapara-yuga, and Kali-yuga. The universal tendency is that as each age passes from the beginning of Satya-yuga, the world's vices increase and virtue decrease until we again reach another Satya-yuga.

RABBI: In the Torah, Moses spoke to the people, instructing them in various commandments given by God. He told them that if they carefully kept the commandments of the Lord, the Lord would bless them in many ways, but if they failed to do so, the Lord would condemn them in many terrible ways. Everything would be taken away from them and they would be so much in want of food, that even the kindest and most gentle of people would eat their own children. It is stated, "You will then eat the fruit of your womb. When your enemies are besieging you will become so desperate that you will actually eat the flesh of

your sons and daughters...." [Torah, Duet, Ki Thavo, 28.53-54] Do the Vedas describe any thing similar to this?

DEVOTEE: The Srimad-Bhagavatam describes that at the end of this age, people will become so degraded, that the Supreme Lord will punish them by taking away many of the necessities of life. At that time, also, out of desperation and in degraded consciousness, they will eat their own children. It seems that although the Torah does not describe a period of destruction and hardship specifically in reference to end of an age, both the calamities described in the Torah and in the Vedas would result from people's unwillingness to follow the laws of God.

Whenever mankind does not accept the laws of God, there will be great havoc in human society regardless of which religious faith one may follow. The Vedas describe that at the end of this degraded age of Kali the Lord will personally come to destroy the miscreant people. Are there any similar descriptions of the coming of God given in the Torah?

RABBI: Yes, and the most famous are: "When the Holy One comes to visit the "Hind" (Israel), He will examine who it is that remains loyal to her at the time, and woe to him who shall not be found worthy..." [Isa. LXII:23]

It is also stated, "Then the Messiah will arise from the Garden of Eden, from that place which is called 'the Bird's Nest'. He will arise in the land of Galilee, and on that day the whole world shall be shaken and all the children of men shall seek refuge in caves and rocky places. Concerning that time, it is written: 'And they shall go into the holes of the rocks and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth.' [Isa. II:19]" [Zohar 7a-7b] Can you explain further about the Vedic version of this period of destruction?

DEVOTEE: Yes. There is a verse in the Srimad-Bhagavatam describing the Kalki incarnation who will come at the end of the Kali-yuga. "Thereafter, at the conjunction of the two yugas (Kali and Satya), the Lord of the creation will take His birth as the Kalki incarnation and become the son of Vishnu Yasa. At that time the rulers of the earth will have degenerated into plunderers." [Bhag. 1.3.25]

Later in the Srimad-Bhagavatam, it is stated, "Lord Kalki, the Lord of the universe, will mount His swift horse Devadatta and, sword in hand, travel over the earth exhibiting His eight mystic opulences and eight special qualities of Godhead. Displaying His unequalled effulgence and riding with great speed, He will kill by the millions those thieves who have dared dress as kings. After all the impostor kings have been killed, the residents of the cities and towns will feel the breezes carrying the most sacred fragrance of the sandalwood paste and other decorations of Lord Vasudeva, and their minds will thereby become transcendently pure." [Bhag. 12.2.19-21]

Chapter Twenty-six: IDOL WORSHIP VS. DEITY WORSHIP

RABBI: Here are two verses from the Holy Torah that mention idol worship: "Cursed is the man who carves an image or casts an idol-a thing detestable to the Lord, the work of the craftsman's hands--and sets it up in secret." [Torah, Duet, Ki Thavo, 27:15] "When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw our fathers, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree. But when they came to Baal Peor, they consecrated themselves to that shameful idol and became as vile as the thing they loved." [Hosea IX:10] Although God so thoroughly condemned the worship of man-made Gods (idols), I have seen that in Hindu temples such images are worshiped. Our conversations have revealed many similarities between Judaism and Hinduism, yet it appears that on this point we strongly differ.

DEVOTEE: The Vedas also are thoroughly opposed to idol worship, but what you have seen in Hindu temples is not idol worship but rather Deity worship. It is very easy to understand how Deity worship may at first appear as idol worship to a person who is unfamiliar with the principle behind this important devotional process. After all, the form of the Deity is crafted by a man out of some kind of material elements, and that form is later worshiped in the temple with devotion. In the Vedas, Deity worship is an extremely important devotional process to help us develop love of God. In fact, it is one of the nine general classifications of devotional service mentioned in Sanskrit in the Vedas. It is said,

sravanam kirtanam visnoh smaranam pada-sevanam
arcanam vandanam dasyam sakhyam atma-nivedanam

"Devotional service consists of (1) hearing about the Lord, (2) chanting His glories, (3) remembering Him, (4) serving and meditating upon His lotus feet, (5) worshipping Him, (6) praying to Him, (7) thinking oneself His eternal servant, (8) becoming His friend, and (9) surrendering everything to Him." [Bhag. 7.5.23] The fifth process mentioned here, arcanam, worshipping the Lord, refers to Deity worship.

RABBI: I still do not see the difference. The Torah also says that one should worship the Lord, but the act of worshipping idols as God is condemned. What makes the Hindu's Deity worship any different from the worship of idols so condemned in the Jewish tradition? How can man worship a form that he himself has crafted?

DEVOTEE: The difference is that God authorizes the worship of Deities. For example, if you put mail into an authorized mailbox it will be delivered to the address written on the envelope. But if you drop that mail into some box other than an authorized mailbox, it will not be delivered. Similarly, if you create some form, call it God, and worship it, all according to your own mental concoction, there will be no benefit and your act will be condemned by God. If however, you create a form according to the actual description of God's form given in the revealed scriptures, and if you worship that form according to the rules and

regulations given by God in the scriptures, you will achieve excellent results. The result of that worship is love for God.

RABBI: In principle I understand that if God actually authorizes some activity, it must be correct. Still, I have difficulty understanding how a person can learn to love God by worshipping a form that he himself has created. Perhaps my difficulty is that in the Jewish scriptures I know of no description of God's form that is detailed enough to allow someone to craft a form like it. Also, I am not familiar with any descriptions in the Jewish scriptures about how to worship such a form like a Deity. Such worship is repeatedly condemned as idolatry.

DEVOTEE: The Torah may not give a clear and detailed description of the form of God, but the Vedas do. The Vedas also give a very detailed description of the method of Deity worship. The principle is that if you want to love God, you must be able to develop some personal relationship with Him. As we have discussed several times, the purpose of religion is to develop love of God. Service to God is the symptom and means to that love. In our impure state, we are not qualified to see the original spiritual form of God and to worship Him. By His mercy He has agreed to appear in the form of His Deity. Therefore, the whole process of Deity worship gives us an opportunity to practice serving God. As the devotee renders continuous and regulated service to the Deity according to the methods authorized in the scriptures, the impurities of our heart gradually become cleansed and our natural loving relationship with the Lord is manifest. Without being able to relate to God in some personal way there is no question of learning to love Him, even though He is all pervading and can accept our offering any time or place.

RABBI: Your explanation helps me have a clearer understanding of Hindu Deity worship. As I was listening to your explanation, I remembered one verse I read, along with the commentary of Rabbi Jose. The verse said, "If they be peaceful and likewise many, and they likewise be shorn, then he shall pass away; and though I have affected thee, I will affect thee no more." [Nahum 1:12] [Zohar II:200b] Rabbi Jose explains this verse thus, "When a people live in peace, and harbor no quarrelsome persons in their midst, God has compassion on them, and rigorous justice is not invoked against them, even though they worship idols." This is in harmony with the verse, "Ephraim is serving idols, let him alone" [Hosea IV:17] [Zohar II:200b] It appears from this verse that the term idol can be used in different ways. Persons who had no faith in God and who were envious of Him performed the idol worship that was condemned by the Lord. They were people who gave up the authorized worship of God for the worship of an unauthorized, manmade idol. It is said, "They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God." [Hosea IV:12] [Zohar II:200b] That kind of worship would never lead to love of God. In fact, it could only lead one away from Him, and thus it was condemned.

DEVOTEE: Yes, Rabbi, I agree with you. The Lord is ultimately interested in the spiritual welfare of everyone. He instructs us to do that which is for our ultimate spiritual benefit and He condemns those activities that are unfavorable for us to develop our love for Him. If we serve the Deity according to the authorized process, then we will be spiritually benefited. Otherwise, we will not.

Chapter Twenty-seven: FOOD

DEVOTEE: Rabbi, what is the proper food to be eaten by a person who is on the spiritual path?

RABBI: God describes the best food for everyone, not only for those on the spiritual path: "Behold, I have given you every seed bearing plant on the face of the earth, and every tree that has seed bearing fruit. It shall be to you for food. For every beast of the field, every bird of the sky, and everything that walks the land, that has in it a living soul, all plant vegetation shall be food." [Torah, Genesis, Bereshith 1:29]

DEVOTEE: The Vedas also prescribe a vegetarian diet for every human being on the basis that it is pleasing to God. In two important verses in the Bhagavad-gita, Lord Krsna describes what we can eat and why. "If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, fruit or water, I will accept it." [Bg. 9.26] "Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer or give away, and whatever austerities you perform - do that, O son of Kunti, as an offering to Me." [Bg. 9.27]

The principle is that a devotee of the Lord should not eat anything without first offering it as sacrifice for the pleasure of the Lord. But we cannot whimsically offer just anything to the Lord and expect that He will accept it. He clearly states in an abbreviated form what He will accept, and clearly it does not include any non-vegetarian food.

RABBI: If one studies the Jewish tradition carefully, it becomes clear that it was never the desire of God that His followers eat meat. He only allowed them to do so, with great restrictions, when He saw that they were unwilling to follow a strict vegetarian diet. This was an act of His mercy because if someone directly disobeys the laws of God, he will incur great sin. But, if the Lord, seeing the unwillingness of his followers to accept His orders, makes His demands easier so the people will follow, then they will not be so thoroughly condemned.

DEVOTEE: We find the same principle in the Vedas. Although the Vedas recommend and teach the highest standards for human society, which will in turn give the greatest positive result, realizing God, they also give ample means for people of all kinds to satisfy their material desires within the religious principles of the Vedas. For example, the Vedas in general condemned animal slaughter and meat eating. Still, for those who are so addicted to eating meat that they cannot control themselves, the Vedas offer a means to eat meat according to religious

principles. Such people are recommended to offer a less important animal such as a goat, in sacrifice to the goddess Kali. They must make this sacrifice only on the dark moon night of the month and they must kill the animal themselves, and hear its pitiable scream as they cut its throat. Just before killing the animal, they must say to the animal a verse saying in effect that "I am killing you in front of the goddess Kali, but in my next life I will be killed in the same way." Clearly, the purpose of this sacrifice was not to encourage animal slaughter but to persuade people to give it up.

RABBI: This is similar to the purposes of the Kosher laws. Especially regarding meat, there are many strict procedures directly aimed at removing every drop of blood before it can be eaten. It is impossible to completely remove all the blood from meat, so the final outcome is that meat cannot be eaten without sin.

Ultimately, this whole troublesome procedure for eating meat is meant to persuade religious people to adopt a vegetarian diet.

In Jewish law, a person was not only supposed to be vegetarian, but he was supposed to show great compassion and care toward his animals. This rule was so much emphasized that he was permitted to break all rules of the Sabbath if necessary to save the life of an animal or to free him from pain.

Chapter Twenty-eight: TEFILLIN AND TILAKA

DEVOTEE: Rabbi, when we ate lunch in the ashram, you asked about the twelve clay markings on the bodies of the devotees. Srila Prabhupada explains them in a letter to one of his new disciples: "The tilaka on the forehead and other parts of the body are symbolic representation of Radha Krsna temples. In other words, by marking tilaka on all parts of our body we become protected by the Lord from all sides. Besides, tilaka marking at once makes one known as a Vaisnava."

RABBI: The same idea is expressed in the Old Testament when Moses spoke to his people, saying: "[These words] shall [also] be a sign on you arm and an insignia in the center of you head." Tefillin here refers to a kind of fourfold leather amulet that Moses instructed the Israelites to wear on their heads and on their left arms. Typically, an amulet is worn to protect one from some kind of evil or injury, and often contained some holy objects within. The amulet referred to here was to contain four chapters from the Torah written on parchment. These amulets are mentioned in Exodus 13:9, Exodus 13:16, Deuteronomy 6:8 and Deuteronomy 11:18. [Torah, Notes 13:9, 13:16] Those who were actually obedient followers of God would follow the instructions given by God's representative Moses so as to be protected by God.

DEVOTEE: When the devotees of Lord Krsna apply tilaka to their body, they chant different names of the Lord. I see that although Moses instructed the people to wear the tefillin (amulet) rather than to make clay markings like the devotees of Lord Krsna, the amulet was to contain the holy instructions of God and His

representative. In Vedic philosophy, the Lord is said to be Absolute. That means that He is equally present in the form of His holy names, His instructions, and His pastimes, etc. Therefore, although externally the devotees of Lord Krsna and Jews follow different customs in this regard, the goal of both is to seek God's protection by keeping God with them either in the form of His holy names or His holy instructions. Naturally, Israelites were not only expected to wear the tefillin but to follow the instructions carried within. Similarly, the devotees should not only apply the tilaka marks to their bodies but also should always chant the holy names of the Lord, follow His instructions, and act in an exemplary way as real followers of Lord Krsna.

Chapter Twenty-nine: CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

DEVOTEE: Rabbi, as a sign of respect and surrender to God and His devotees, Vaisnavas traditionally have always bowed down, lying flat on the ground. Although I remember reading about this in the Old Testament, I have never seen this practiced in Jewish synagogues.

RABBI: Yes, you are quite right. This was the Jewish custom, although with time the practice has been lost. Here are two verses from the Torah, which describe what you have mentioned:

"[Abraham] lifted his eyes and he saw three strangers a short distance from him. When he saw (them) from the entrance of his tent, he ran to greet them, bowing down to the ground." [Torah, Genesis, VaYerah 18:2] A stranger, in this verse literally means anonymous men. They were actually angels in disguise. [Torah, Notes 18:2]

"The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, while Lot was sitting at the city gate. Lot saw them and got up to greet them, bowing with his face to the ground." [Torah, Genesis, VaYerah, 19:1]

DEVOTEE: It is also the Vedic custom to at least wash one's hands and feet, if not to bathe fully, before going into a temple to see the Lord. One place this is practiced is Jagannatha Puri, India. His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada explains that Narendra is a small lake still existing in Jagannatha Puri, where the Candana-yatra festival takes place. Up to the present date, all Bengali devotees who visit the Jagannatha temple first take their bath in the lake. There they wash their hands and feet before entering the temple, as is the custom at all Vaisnava temples.

RABBI: In the Torah, God ordered Moses saying: "Make a copper washstand along with a copper base for it. Place it between the altar and the Communion Tent, and fill it with water for washing. Aaron and his sons must wash their hands and feet from [this washstand]. If they are not to die, they must wash with the water [of this wash stand] before entering the Communion Tent or approaching the altar to perform the divine service, presenting a fire offering to

God. If they are not to deserve death, they must first wash their hands and feet. This shall be for Aaron and his descendants a law for all time, for all generations." [Torah, Exodus, Ki Thisa 30:19-21]

Chapter Thirty: TAKING SHELTER OF THE LORD RATHER THAN MATERIAL FACILITIES

DEVOTEE: Rabbi, can you tell what the Jewish scriptures say regarding activities that should be avoided by a good Jew and why those activities should be avoided?

RABBI: In the Torah, when the Israelites were travelling toward the Promised Land, they were ordered by God not to perform certain kinds of activities practiced by sinful and materialistic people. Some of those activities involved communicating with the dead through mediums, practicing witchcraft, casting of spells, etc. He indicated that they should not seek answers from the material science of astrology, for that was meant for materialistic people. He wanted his people to depend on Him for everything and not give up that dependence to take shelter of any materialistic methods, especially those revolting practices performed by the lower classes. Throughout their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land under the guidance of Moses, God time and time again showed that He would give them protection and would maintain them if they would follow His orders. God was insisting that they take shelter of Him and continue to do so even after they reached the Promised Land.

DEVOTEE: The same idea is in the Vedas. Although God is aware that most people are materialistic, He gives us the free will to engage in mundane activities, still He makes what He wants very clear. He says in the Bhagavad-gita, "Give up all varieties of religion and just surrender under me. I will protect you from all sinful reactions." [Bg. 18.66] That means that we must give up any activity other than devotion to the Lord. We must make the Lord the center of our lives as our only shelter from the material, as the means to achieve happiness and our protection. Lord Krsna further says in this connection, "Engage your mind always in thinking of Me, become My devotee, offer obeisances to Me and worship Me. Being completely absorbed in Me, surely you will come to Me." [Bg. 9.34]

RABBI: Although I can see why God would discourage His followers from performing degraded activities like witchcraft or communicating with the dead, but what about the basic activities required to live? Are we really expected to just sit around and make no endeavor to acquire our basic necessities of life in the name of taking shelter of God rather than material facilities?

DEVOTEE: Certainly the Lord does not want us to become lazy or irresponsible in the name of surrendering to Him. Krsna consciousness or surrender to the Supreme Lord is supposed to be very practical for everyone. The understanding is based on the principle; everything belongs to the Supreme Lord and should be

engaged in His service. For example, if we are to serve the Lord we must eat to have energy. We should not sit and wait for the Lord to hand us food. Rather, we should work, making honest endeavors. The principle is to accept whatever is favorable for engaging in devotional service and to reject whatever is not and use that which we have to educate others.

RABBI: What about astrology? In both the Jewish and Vedic traditions, astrology is an exact science that can be used to understand our future. There is indication in the Torah that God did not want the Israelites to take advantage of it. He said, "Do not act on the basis of auspicious times." Is there anything in the Vedas that would explain why the Lord would discourage the use of such a useful science?

DEVOTEE: Astrology, although a very exact science, is often misused by materialistic people so they can understand something of the future and take advantage of it for material purposes. They try to avoid inauspicious reactions indicated by an astrological reading. A person who is fully surrendered to the Lord is not concerned about the future. We accept whatever happens in our life as the mercy of the Lord. We do not want to distract our attention from our service to the Lord worrying about changing or avoiding certain upcoming reactions. In the Torah, God ordered His followers to not allow anything to distract them from their surrender and service to Him, their Lord. The same principle, full surrender to the Lord, can be found in any religious faith.

Chapter Thirty-one: THE UNIVERSAL FORM

DEVOTEE: In the Bhagavad-gita, Lord Krsna reveals His universal form to His devotee Arjuna. This is a very special form of the Lord that is not one of the Lord's eternal spiritual forms. After revealing this form, He says to Arjuna, "O Arjuna, whatever you wish to see, behold at once in this body of Mine! This universal form can show you whatever you now desire to see and whatever you may want to see in the future. Everything - moving and non-moving - is here completely, in one place." [Bg. 11.7] In other words, Arjuna was able to see what even the greatest scientists cannot see - everything past, present, and future, everywhere in the universe, even while sitting in one place. Do the Jewish scriptures describe any visions of God similar to this universal form?

RABBI: There is a statement similar to this. It says, "When an individual looks into these permutations in a proper manner, he can see all of the creation. He is like a person looking into a glass mirror, who sees both his own face and the faces of all who pass by." [Meditation and the Kabbalah, p. 78] In other words, when a person properly chants the names of God, he can become qualified to see this form.

DEVOTEE: Because of Arjuna's purity, Lord Krsna agreed to give him divine eyes to see His universal form. The statement you just quoted from Meditation

and the Kabbalah clearly says, it was by properly chanting the names of God (looking into the permutations in a proper manner) that a person could qualify himself to see this form. According to Vedic understanding also, if one chants the holy names of the Lord properly, without offense, the Lord will reveal everything to us according to His pleasure. Pure chanting ultimately means to chant the Lord's holy names while not maintaining even a tinge of desire separate from the desire of the Lord. That is pure devotion. Arjuna was not known for always chanting the Lord's names like a religious monk, priest or rabbi might, but he was certainly a soul fully surrendered to Lord Krsna and thus became qualified to see the universal form.

Chapter Thirty-two: THE OMNISCIENCE AND OMNIPOTENCE OF GOD AND HIS PURE SERVANTS

RABBI: In the Torah, God says, "Behold, the former things have come to pass, and I am declaring new things. I am telling you of them before they spring forth. [Torah, Halftorah of Bereshith, Isaiah 42:9] I think that any religion in the world accepts that God knows everything - past, present and future.

DEVOTEE: Yes, Rabbi, I think that you are right. In the Bhagavad-gita, Lord Krsna says, "I am seated in everyone's heart, and from Me comes remembrance, knowledge and forgetfulness. By all the Vedas, I am to be known. Indeed, I am the compiler of Vedanta, and I am the knower of the Vedas." [Bg. 15.15] Not only is the Supreme Lord omniscient but His pure devotees are also omniscient by the grace of the Lord Who is the source of their knowledge.

RABBI: According to the Vedas, how can an ordinary person know everything past, present and future?

DEVOTEE: The answer to your question is in the verse I just quoted. God as the Supersoul is in the heart of every living entity. Our intelligence comes from the Supersoul. Since the Lord knows everything, if He wants to give intelligence to someone, it is not difficult for Him. The Lord is always ready to give us direction from within the heart, but generally we are not receptive to His good instructions. We have many material desires that oppose the desires of the Lord. The pure devotees however are souls fully surrendered to the will of the Lord. When the Lord speaks to them from within the heart, they understand fully. Thus pure devotees are known as tri-kala-jna, or those who can understand everything past, present and future.

RABBI: Moses was able to speak directly with God, and the Lord constantly gave him specific instructions of what would happen in the future and how to act in His service. For example, God, already knowing the mind of the Pharaoh, instructed Moses how to convince him to permit the Israelites to leave Egypt. God told Moses, "Observe! I will be making you like a god to the Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. You must announce all that I order you

to, and your brother Aaron will relate it to the Pharaoh. He will then let the Israelites leave his land. I will make the Pharaoh obstinate, and will thus have the opportunity to display many miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt. This is why the Pharaoh will not pay attention to you. But then I will display My power against Egypt, and with great acts of judgment, I will bring forth from Egypt my armies - My people, the Israelites. When I display My power and bring the Israelites out from among them, Egypt will know that I am God " [Torah, Exodus, VaYerah 7:13] Moses and Aaron did exactly as God instructed and the Pharaoh responded as God predicted. This was the prelude of the ten great plagues brought about by God against the Pharaoh and his people. Not only did God know everything, but He also gave perfect intelligence to Moses and empowered him to act as his instrument to free the Israelites from the Pharaoh's control.

DEVOTEE: In the Vedic culture there were saintly persons like Moses who had direct communion with God. The most recent was the Founder-Acharya of The International Society for Krishna Consciousness, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Although Srila Prabhupada, as we would affectionately call him, did not openly perform miracles of the magical quality shown by Moses, he was fully empowered by God, Krsna, to propagate Krsna consciousness throughout the world. The real miracle that Srila Prabhupada performed was that he transformed millions of miserable people addicted to all kinds of sinful life, and made them happy by giving them Krsna consciousness, or devotion to God.

One of his most important contributions was his elaborate translations and commentaries of Vedic literatures, the Bhagavad-gita, Srimad-Bhagavatam, and Caitanya-Caritamrita. Unlike ordinary scholars who must write and rewrite their books until they feel they are ready, Srila Prabhupada would simply dictate them once. The information and instructions given in his books are flawless. Without being directly instructed and empowered by the Lord, no one can successfully propagate pure God consciousness. Srila Prabhupada said that Lord Krsna constantly directed his actions, and that he never acted independently of the Lord's instructions.

RABBI: So once again I see that God does not discriminate against any religious path. He will give the necessary intelligence and ability to any of his pure servants to carry out His mission.

DEVOTEE: Yes, and not only that. Besides the Lord empowering His servants to act wonderfully on His behalf, He personally arranges to glorify His pure servants or pure devotees who have no tinge of desire other than to please Him. As God predicted, in spite of His sending calamity after calamity to the Egyptians for their unwillingness to let the Israelites leave to serve God, the Pharaoh became more and more hard hearted. In fact, the Lord said that He would make the Pharaoh obstinate just so that He could display many miraculous acts in Egypt. The Lord could have immediately killed everyone in Egypt, but He chose

to perform miracle after miracle (as the ten plagues) to increase His own glories and to increase the glories of Moses who was intimately acting as His instrument. Srila Prabhupada's situation was similar. He always glorified the Lord and asked nothing for himself. By the grace of the Lord Srila Prabhupada is glorified by millions of people all over the world for the spiritual contributions that he gave the world as His service to Lord Krsna.

Chapter Thirty-three: LIFE COMES FROM LIFE

RABBI: There is a great controversy between the religionists and the scientists regarding the source of life. According to the entire first two chapters of Genesis of the Torah God created everything, including all forms of plants, fish, mammals, birds, insects and human beings. There is no mention of any of the species of life arising from an inorganic source. The materialistic scientists' theories only give reasons for man to look away from God. They try to prove that life came from an inorganic source, which would imply that there is no God. The similarly inclined speculative philosophers then attempt to create philosophies to justify materialistic man's ultimate hope - for a life of unrestricted sense enjoyment without any accountability. If there were no God, then we would ultimately be unaccountable to anyone for our actions.

DEVOTEE: Yes, this is our material disease, to want to act like there is no God or that we are God. In the Bhagavad-gita Lord Krsna says, "I am the source of all spiritual and material worlds. Everything emanates from Me. The wise who perfectly know this engage in My devotional service and worship Me with all their hearts." [Bg. 10.8] Without understanding that God is the source or the fountainhead of everything two problems are created. First, we will justify our desire to be the center of existence - as both the enjoyers and controllers. Second, if we do not accept the existence of God, we will not be able to engage in loving transcendental service to the Lord. Both are artificial positions that will not bring us any true satisfaction or happiness, regardless of our success at material enjoyment. That is, the highest material enjoyment will not truly satisfy the soul. Certainly, our conviction that God is the source of creation is an essential building block for a spiritually progressive and happy human society.

RABBI: Even with millions of people believing in principle that God is the source of everything, the world continues to become more materialistic. The more materialistic and atheistic it becomes, the more people will suffer. So it is of utmost importance that we become convinced that God is the source of everything and that we each have a perfect, transcendental, loving relationship with Him.

Closely related to the discussion of the original source of life is whether all species of life were existing since the beginning of God's creation or if they developed over time such as in the Darwinian theory. Again, in the first two

chapters of Genesis it is clearly stated that God created all the species of life. Additionally, it is not logical that so many complex changes could take place totally based on chance.

DEVOTEE: I totally agree. It is said that not a blade of grass blows in the wind without the sanction of the Lord. There is nothing in the Lord's creation that happens by chance. If the sun deviated even slightly from its path, the whole earth would either burn up or freeze. In either case, life as we know it would be destroyed on earth. Yet, for countless millions of years the sun has not gone off its path.

There is a kind of evolution however, but it is far removed from the atheistic Darwinian theory. This evolution is one of increasing consciousness, as the soul transmigrates from one species of life to another. The Vedas describe that there are innumerable species of life in the universe of which only a relatively small number are human beings. Only in the human form of life can a soul perfect himself through devotional service. To take a human birth is the greatest fortune and we should fully utilize this golden opportunity to cultivate devotion to God. If we misuse our human birth, dedicating our time and energy to gratifying our senses without interest in God, we will lose our human existence and again take birth in the lower species of life.

Chapter Thirty-four: ABORTIONS

RABBI: One of the ten great commandments delivered by Moses was "Do not commit murder." [Torah, Exodus, Yithro, 20:13] Although there is virtually no argument about the meaning of this commandment in reference to killing people, there is much controversy in the world about its application regarding the abortion issue. Some people do not consider the child in the womb as a living person until the seventh month of pregnancy. They argue that if there is no movement, it is only a lifeless lump of flesh and can be removed just like a cancer.

DEVOTEE: There is life from the first moment of conception, as immediately the cells begin dividing and expanding. In the womb of a human mother, the foetus at any stage of growth is already a human being. If that foetus is killed, it is the same as murdering an adult.

The Vedas warn us that those who abort their own children, perform the abortion, facilitate it or even support them are thoroughly condemned. They will themselves enter the wombs of other mothers and be aborted again and again.

RABBI: Many people argue in favor of abortions because they facilitate their desire for unrestricted sex. They want sex without responsibility, but that is not pleasing to God. That will not help one to return to the Garden of Eden, the kingdom of God. The Torah's laws are meant to guide man in practical day to day life so that he can ultimately qualify himself to realize God.

DEVOTEE: Materialists think that sex is required to be happy. They have no idea that one can learn to be satisfied without sex life. If a person, man or woman, had no interest in sex then abortions would be unnecessary. They are unable to do that. Therefore, in the Vedas it is said, adanta-gobhir tamisram. "By nonrestricted sense enjoyment they are gradually going down to the lower species of life." [Bhag. 7.5.30] We were recently discussing that there are millions of species of life in the universe, but why so many? One reason is to facilitate the variegated, animalistic desires of those persons who are addicted to sex enjoyment. The only activities of the animals are eating, sleeping, mating, and defending. They have no interest in, or ability to understand religious subject matter. If we waste our human birth engaging only in animal propensities, we will be forced to take birth among those species. The Vedic culture teaches one to become detached from all kinds of sense desires while cultivating God consciousness, and to feel very satisfied in that way. Thus, the abortion problem is merely one of the symptoms of the world's spiritual starvation, proving that people need to be educated in the science of God.

RABBI: Many people, not wanting to take responsibility for family life nor to experience guilt for having an abortion, utilize contraceptives to prevent pregnancy. Once a person in my congregation told me confidentially that although he was married, he was not at all prepared to accept the responsibility for raising a family proportionate to the number of children who would likely result from his indulgences with his wife. He asked me which was better, to prevent pregnancy with contraceptives or to abort the unwanted children? I told him that of the two, the use of contraceptives seemed to be the lesser of two evils. Personally, I was not very satisfied with my advice. What do you think?

DEVOTEE: According to the Vedic literatures there is practically no difference. First, we must understand why it is wrong to kill the child in the womb. In one sense, it is the same reason that we do not kill other living entities. As we discussed recently, the soul undergoes a spiritual evolution from one species of life to another, from one human body to another until he fully realizes his eternal loving relationship with God. Whenever you kill a person, an animal, or the child in the womb, you are interrupting his progress on the spiritual path. You are detaining him from perfecting his life through self-realization. Through the act of sex a man and woman are in effect inviting a soul to take shelter of the womb to continue its progress toward realizing God. By the use of contraceptives, a person is actually rendering the womb unfit for that soul, thus interfering with his progress. Therefore, both abortions and the use of contraceptives are sinful because they are obstacles on the soul's journey back to God. If I was in your position, I would have told him that both choices are totally sinful because either one would interfere with a soul's spiritual progress. I would have tried to convince him and his wife to seriously cultivate God consciousness and experience the higher taste of spiritual happiness. By experiencing that higher

taste they would automatically be able to control their sexual desires and avoid any consideration of sinful alternatives.

Chapter Thirty-five: CONCLUSION - RELIGION BACKED BY PHILOSOPHY AND ITS EFFECT ON MODERN EDUCATION AND THE DESTINY OF THE WORLD

The first thirty-four chapters of this book have established loving service to God as the common denominator of all religious faiths. That common denominator represents the conclusion of the theistic philosophy of the Vedic culture. The Vedic society was so structured that every living being had full opportunity to gradually realize God. At the same time, the Vedic social system was so well organized that it could provide all the necessities of life for its citizens. This was accomplished much more efficiently than today's materialistic society, because of the prevailing international drive for over consumption. Conversely the Vedic society's success was based on a theistic philosophical structure.

When individually applied, our religious practice will become effective, and thus favorable to help solve our problems, when it is backed by philosophy, logic and reason. In the same way, our society will succeed in solving its problems when we are governed by laws based on a theistic philosophical system, that is, directed toward God consciousness rather than materialism. An intelligent person will naturally ask, "What are effective religious practices?" "What are the real problems of life?" "Why must religion be backed by philosophy?" "Through which institution can that combination best help our society?"

Our religious practices are considered effective when they result in love of God. Anyone can say that he loves God, but love of God is not cheap. The symptom of love is service to the beloved, God. To the degree that we increase our love for God, we will naturally lose our attachment for material life. If there is no detachment from material life, how can there be love and intimate reciprocation with God and with each other?

We all want to solve the problems of life, but they are endless. A thoughtful person will naturally try to solve them, but the greatest dilemma is that we are entangled in material existence. That is, we are caught in the cycle of birth, disease, old age and death. If we can learn and teach others how to become free from this cycle and return to the kingdom of God, the Jewish Garden of Eden, all our other problems will be automatically solved.

All religious scriptures share a common philosophical root, without which they could not culminate in love of God, as the path and goal. The difficulty is, the essence of religion, love of God and all of His creation, has been gradually de-emphasized in many faiths, so the philosophy that has supported this essential principle, has been minimized. Our faith has been replaced by attachment to customs, language, and other cultural artefacts.

The Jewish Torah is supported by many literatures such as the Zohar, the Bahir, the Talmud, and Sefer Yetzirah. They are full of esoteric philosophical principles, but this literature is not taught to common Jews, and Rabbis approach these subjects only after many years of study. Additionally, many of those books have been written in codes and parables that are very difficult, if not impossible to understand. The written language of Hebrew has also changed considerably over the centuries. Perhaps more than anything, the influence of time has drawn the world and religion toward materialism. As we mentioned in the Introduction to Equality Based on the Soul, "Unfortunately, due to our deep attachment to materialism, we are conditioned to appreciate religion in the same manner as we perceive ordinary social activity. That is, we become attached to identifying with the external or social side of religion, while we forget its essence - loving service to God." For Jews, the misdirected philosophy has resulted in the splitting of an original tradition, which was formerly graced by persons such as Moses, Abraham and Jacob, who were all dedicated to the mission of God. Judaism is now sometimes known as "bankers and business" communities. Although one can be God conscious and still economically well-to-do, this is generally not the way people perceive the Jewish community. This is the result of having lost sight of the philosophical basis of the religious tradition.

A similar fate has distracted the Hindu religion from its original roots. Although the Hindus accept the Vedas, the scriptures of the Vedic culture; much of the original purpose of the Vedas has been lost to the world. Since Sripad Sankaracharya appeared to propagate his philosophy of impersonalism, all of India and the rest of the world have been adversely affected. According to the impersonalist philosophy there is ultimately no eternal loving relationship with God. That is the ultimate materialistic philosophy because it teaches that we are all God and therefore we are not accountable to anyone. The ultimate materialistic dream is to have unrestricted sense enjoyment without accountability. Materialism always results in frustration and unhappiness, and this is the result of having separated religious sentiment from the theistic philosophy that supports it.

Ultimately, every religious tradition in the world is supported by a theistic philosophy, which is non different from the philosophy found in the Vedas such as the Bhagavad-gita and the Srimad-Bhagavatam. The words may differ, but the principles are the same. These principles must be taught to everyone - equality based on the soul!

The problems among students in the public school system have become acute, especially where all teachings of God have been removed. Leaders in the field of education should not expect that a student's religious cultivation will only take place in the home. They must be taught religion in school, but not in a sectarian way. At the present moment, most governments of the world are opposed to teaching about God in the public school system because they do not know how to teach one student about God without infringing upon another student's beliefs.

They should be taught the basic philosophical principles, the eternal truths, which are found in every religious tradition. Even the atheists should be taught those truths, based on logic and reason. No one can ultimately deny the existence of God. Each person has the free will to follow the religious tradition he desires, but if he does not properly understand the philosophical principles that support his religion, he will not derive much benefit from its practice.

Who will be our leaders? Religiously qualified or not, they will act according to their own nature, many will take roles in society as government leaders, school teachers, scientists, philosophers, and most important, as parents. In effect everyone will have others under their guidance to lead or mislead according to their leadership ability, integrity and knowledge of the absolute truth. Their most important qualification, as our leaders, will be their knowledge and realization of the science and philosophy of God, and how to practically apply that science for the benefit of all.

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Bhaktivedanta Book Trust

By His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

Meditation and the Kabbalah (1st Published in 1982 by Samuel Weiser, Inc.)

By Aryeh Kaplan 1982

Printed in the U.S.A. by McNaughton & Gunn

The Holy Scriptures

Hebrew Publishing Company New York

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Printed in the U.S.A.

Printed and Bound by Montauk Bookbinding Corp, NY

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