

Manifestation of Souls and Where They Go

By Stephen Knapp

This is the story of how and from where souls manifest, and their evolution through the material realm and liberation from it. Sometimes there are questions from people regarding the means by which the innumerable spiritual living beings are created or manifested from God. And how are we eternal, or how did we end up in this material creation? So many living beings are seen in the material world in the large variety of species of animals, plants, insects, aquatics, birds, and human beings. If we really understood the oneness of the source from which all of us have appeared, there would be no question that not only are we all related, but spiritually speaking, we are all the same. We may look different according to the forms of material bodies that we wear. But if we could keep this spiritual understanding of reality in mind, it would make the reasons why there is so much quarrel and war in the material worlds look all the more foolish.

THE ORIGINS OF THE JIVAS

To begin with, it is explained in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (2.2.20) that, AAs tiny sparks fly from a fire, so all the individual souls have come from the Supreme.® Thus, the individual souls come from the Supreme Being as sparks come from a fire, or as rays of light come from the sun. However, as the rays of light are both different and the same as their source, so the individual souls are different in power and size, yet the same in quality with the Supreme.

In this line of thought, learned scholars of the Vedic spiritual topics, such as the Gosvamis of Vrindavana, have analyzed that the Supreme Personality has sixty-four principle attributes. Sri Krishna is the possessor of all these attributes, while His incarnations and the *avatars* possess up to 93 percent of these spiritual characteristics. Lord Shiva possesses up to 84 percent of these transcendental qualities. The *jiva* souls possess only up to the limit of 78 percent of these spiritual attributes, in minute degrees, varying in terms to the level of piety in which the living beings exist.¹ This is how *jiva* souls are similar in quality to the Lord but different in quantity and power.

One of the big differences is that the Lord is the controller of all energies, including the illusory potency, *maya*, while the individual souls can come under the influence of this illusory energy.²

We can also explain it this way: The Supreme Being, Sri Krishna, is like the blazing fire or sun. The *chit-shakti*, or the thinking potency or power of complete knowledge, is present in the center of that sun. A great expanse is illuminated by the sunlight. The rays of this light, or the effulgence of the Supreme, are manifested by the *chit-shakti*. The rays that come from that effulgence are the particles of His internal potency, the *svarupa-shakti*. Those atomic particles that make up the rays of His potency are the individual spirit souls. It is the internal or spiritual potency, the *svarupa-shakti*, that is the core or cause of this blazing fire of the Supreme Being. The individual souls or particles of light that are manifested from that fire, or in the rays of the effulgence, are manifested by the Lord=s potency known as the *jiva-shakti*. This is how the Lord=s spiritual potencies work together to manifest the *jiva-shakti* sunlight. This sunlight or

illumination shines on the borderline, or *tata*, in between the spiritual and material worlds. In this way, the spirit souls are generated in the region between the spiritual and material energies known as the *tatastha-shakti*, which will be explained further a little later in this booklet.³

So herein we can also understand that the *jivas* are not created like something we produce in the material world. They are manifested from the eternal Lord and co-exist in the same way as the sunshine co-exists with the sun. However, the sunshine is dependent on the sun the same as the individual souls are dependent on the Supreme Soul. Thus, as we do not say the sun creates the rays of the sun because there is no beginning to the process, the *jiva* souls are also said to be eternal as is the Supreme Being. We are emanated from the Lord, and just as the Lord is eternal, so are His emanations, the *jiva* souls. So, the spirit souls are originally from beyond time and, thus, eternal.

The *Svetashvatara Upanishad* (4.10) explains "The Lord has got three principle potencies viz. 1) *Svarupa-shakti*, or essential potency; 2) *jiva-shakti* or *tatastha-shakti*, or marginal potency; and 3) *maya-shakti* or external potency. So the phenomenal world is manifested by His external potency, and the wielder of this *maya* is the great God Himself. And the whole world is pervaded with beings who are emanated from the marginal potency, otherwise known as His *vibhannamsa* [separated parts]."

In the *Vishnu Purana* (6.7.61) it is also described that an energy or *shakti* called the *kshetrajna-shakti* is the *tatastha* or *jiva-shakti*, which is the marginal energy. From this energy countless *jivas* are generated.

So the Vedic literature explains that it is this *tatastha-shakti* from which the *jiva* souls are generated. The spiritual world is a manifestation of the Lord's internal and superior energy, while the material world is a product of the Lord's external or inferior energy. But the living beings are a product of the Lord's marginal energy or *tatastha-shakti*. The living entities are part of that *tatastha-shakti*, so they are energy, not the energetic. It is the Supreme Lord who is the Supreme Energetic, or source of all energies.

This is further confirmed by His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami in his purport to *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (3.7.9) in which he states: "According to *Vishnu Purana*, *Bhagavad-gita*, and all other Vedic literatures, the living entities are generated from the *tatastha* energy of the Lord, and thus they are always the energy of the Lord. . ."

The *tatastha-shakti* is located on the boundaries between the material and spiritual energies. *Tatastha* means "in between". It also means that it is sometimes manifested and sometimes not manifested, like the material energy. Yet the potency is always there since it exists within the Supreme Lord.

Lord Krishna Himself explains His energies in the *Bhagavad-gita* this way: "The whole cosmic order is under Me. By My will it is manifested again and again, and by My will it is annihilated at the end. (Bg. 9.8) Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intelligence and false ego—altogether these eight comprise My separated material energies. Besides this inferior nature, O mighty-armed Arjuna, there is a superior energy of Mine, which are all living entities who are struggling with material nature and are sustaining the universe." (Bg. 7.4-5) This means that the living beings are an energy of the Lord that are superior to the material or external energy. Yet, they are still subordinate to the Lord.

The *jiva's* constitutional position is that he is an eternal servant of the Lord Krishna. The *jiva* is the marginal energy of the Lord, which means he is one yet different from the Supreme Being. So the *jiva* is eligible to enter both the spiritual or material energies, and, thus, also known

as *tatastha*, marginal.

To explain further, the *jivas* have the inherent quality of knowledge. They are conscious, transcendental, birthless, and immutable. In their original identity, all *jivas* are equal, infinitesimal, eternal, inexhaustible, indestructible, and naturally enjoy spiritual bliss. In their original positions they are servants of the Supreme Lord. (Jiva Gosvami=*s Paramatma Sandarbha* 19, from the *Padma Purana*)

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In explaining the *tatastha-shakti*, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta writes in his book, *Sri Caitanya=*s Teachings** (Part Two, Chapter One, p. 365-6, 391-2, Third edition), that all human souls are emanations from the Lord=*s tatastha-shakti*, which is the region found between the eternal (spiritual) and temporal (material) worlds. It is by this potency that God manifests human souls. . . The *tatastha* has the power to associate with both the material or eternal spiritual planes of existence. Souls coming from this region have free will, which they can use properly or improperly. In the *tatastha* region, souls do not show any activity, but are in an indolent stage until they choose which direction they wish to go. However, with this independence, the *jiva* may choose to engage in one of two fields of activity. When he feels like enjoying, or that he is the predominating Lord of the energy he surveys, the *jiva* soul is in a fallen condition and enters the field of *maya*. When the soul shows the aptitude for serving the Supreme, he is freed from the illusory influence of *maya* and can engage in the eternal service of the Supreme Being.

So the *tatastha* region is in between the spiritual and material worlds, and is where the living beings are manifested. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (4.3.9 & 18) describes it like so: AA person has two places: the spiritual world and the place where the spiritual world meets another world. There is also a third place, a place of dreams [the material domain]. Standing between them, the soul sees on one side the spiritual world and on the other the place of dreaming. . . As a large fish in a river may go to one shore or the other, so a person may go to one world or another. He may go to a world where he is awake, or may go to a world made of dreams. @

The *tatastha* region is further explained by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur in his *Jaiva Dharma* (Volume Three, Chapter 15, page 70-1) as follows:

The place where a river=*s waters meet with the land of the shore is called the Atata. @ The Atata@ is then the place where the water meets land. What is the nature of this Atata@? It is like the thinnest of threads that runs along the boundary of land and water. A Atata@ is like the finest of lines, so small that the gross material eyes cannot even see it. In this example the spiritual world is like the water and the material world is like the land. The thin line that separates them is the Atata. @ That boundary place is the abode of the individual spirit souls. The individual souls are like the atomic particles of sunlight. The souls can see both the spiritual world and the material world created by *maya*. The Lord=*s spiritual potency, chit-shakti*, is limitless, and the Lord=*s material potency, maya-shakti*, is gigantic. Standing between them, the individual spirit soul is very tiny. The individual spirit souls are manifested from the *tatastha-shakti* of Lord Krishna. Therefore the souls are naturally situated on the boundary (*tatastha*) of matter and*

spirit.

The *Atastha* nature of the souls refers to the fact that they must be under the control of one of these two potencies. The actual place of the *Atata* (shore) may change. What was once dry land may be covered with water, and what was once covered by water may again become dry land. If he [the *jiva* soul] turns his gaze upon Lord Krishna, the soul comes under the shelter of Lord Krishna=s spiritual potency. But if he turns away from Krishna and turns his gaze to the material potency, *maya*, then the soul is caught in *maya*=s trap. That is what is meant by the soul=s *tastha* nature.©

The spirit souls are completely spiritual. However, because they are atomic in size, the souls are not very strong. That is why *maya* can dominate them. However, in the soul=s nature there is not the slightest scent of *maya*.

From this description we can understand that the *tastha* region is also a tendency or freedom of the individual spirit soul to independently choose the plane of existence in which he wishes to associate. However, it is the natural sentiment of the living being to serve God. This is why it is also described above that there is no *maya* whatsoever in the nature of the soul. This is further explained by Bhaktivinoda Thakura in his *Sri Caitanya Shikshamrita* (pp.156-7), in which he relates that just as God has His *svarupa-vigraha*, or essential and eternal form, so the *jiva* also has his *chit-vigraha*, or eternal form with complete knowledge. That *chit* body is manifested in Vaikuntha, the spiritual domain, not in the material realm. However, while in the material worlds, the *jiva*=s *chit* body is hidden under the two coverings of the subtle and gross physical bodies. The *chit* body of the soul, in which is the natural mood of serving the Lord, was in existence prior to its contact with matter. However, due to its contact with *maya*, the consciousness of the soul becomes transformed to consider itself a servant of matter, meaning the mind, senses, and the physical body. In this way, the *jiva* soul becomes entrapped in *maya*, and its spiritual nature and identity become hidden.

Ramanujacharya explains the hidden identity of the soul while in the material realm in his commentary on the *Vedanta-sutra* (4.4.3). He describes the soul=s pure qualities as being shrunk while in the material world, and then being expanded into pure knowledge, bliss, etc., upon liberation when the karmic bondage is destroyed. Thus, the soul was always pure from the start. Only from the contamination of consciousness while in association with matter does the soul appear to be misdirected.

Therefore, *maya* has nothing to do with the creation nor the identity of the spirit souls. The individual souls are small and weak, and can be influenced by *maya*, but they are superior to it.⁴ Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur also explains in his book, *Brahmana and Vaishnava* (Chapter Two, p. 86), that before acquiring any material designations, the living entity is supremely pure.

This leads to the point that the *jiva* soul is eternal and ever-existing, and so is his function, or *dharma*, which is to love and serve God, especially in the form of Sri Krishna. When the soul becomes purified from its association with matter, his spiritual identity and devotion to God become revived and expanded.

HOW THE JIVAS ENTER MAYA

The *jiva* souls, being a product from the *tatastha-shakti* and part of the marginal energy, are susceptible to the material energy, though superior by nature. But as long as the *jiva* stays submissive or obedient to the position of the Lord, he can remain free from the influence of the material energy. When the living beings forget their connection with Krishna and their spiritual identity, they then come under the control of *maya*, the illusory energy, which is the domain of Durga. It is as if they are confined to the prison of the material energy. Such an existence will continue until they can raise their consciousness and remember their spiritual identity and again become submissive to Supreme Being.

Once they are influenced by *maya*, they are forced to undergo the revolutions of the wheel of their karma. Then, they are situated in *samsara*, the cycles of birth and death. If they can begin to remember their spiritual identity and connection with Krishna, then they can begin to break free from the influence of the illusory energy.

Not only are the living beings eternal, but so is the material nature. This means that they both existed before the material creation. Both the material energy and the living beings within it are of the superior energy of the Lord and existed within the Supreme Being in His form of Maha-Vishnu. From Maha-Vishnu come both the material energy and the living entities to form the cosmic creation.⁵

This is also confirmed in the *Aitareya Upanishad* (1.1.1) which describes things in this way: Before the creation of the universe, verily the Brahman (the Supreme Personality of Godhead in the form of Lord Vishnu) along with His own potency was existent and nothing else remained separately. Thereby it is to be known that His *tatastha-shakti* (the potency that encompasses the individual *jiva* souls), and *maya*, His external potency, were not separately existing but they were within Him.

It is further explained that Maha-Vishnu, who appears in the Karana Ocean and is an incarnation of the Lord's form of Sankarshana, becomes the resting place of the *jiva-shakti*.⁶ There is one marginal potency, known as the *jiva*. Maha-Sankarshana [Maha-Vishnu] is the shelter of all *jivas*.⁷ It is this Sankarshana who is the original source of all living entities appearing in the material world because they are expansions of His marginal potency. Some of these become conditioned by the material energy while others are under the protection of the spiritual nature.⁸

It is further related that Sankarshana, or Maha-Vishnu, is Vasudeva's [Krishna's] personal expansion for pastimes. Not only is Sankarshana the reservoir and original source of all living entities, but when the cosmic creation is annihilated, the indestructible living entities return to His body and rest until the next creation.⁹

To continue this line of thought, it is explained that when Maha-Vishnu glances at *maya* in the process of creation, He sends numberless atomic souls into the material energy. However, once they are on the side of *maya*, the *jivas* become affected and entrapped by the illusory attractions of the material energy. It is because they are atomic in size and appear from the *tatastha-shakti* region, or the border between the material and spiritual energies, that they must glance on either the spiritual or material energies. It is explained that since they have not engaged in the service of the Lord before, or have already become materially conditioned souls from the previous manifestation of the creation, they are swayed by the influence of *maya* and desire to enjoy the temporary pleasures that *maya* has to offer. Once these same souls turn toward spiritual

life and the service of the Lord, they can attain their original transcendental nature and enter the spiritual world.¹⁰ Thus, as the spirit souls manifest from Lord Vishnu within the material creation, they can choose to become involved in the material worlds, or go to the spiritual domain.

Regarding how Maha-Vishnu fills the universe with conditioned souls, the great sage Markandeya explains in the *Vishnudharmottara Purana* (1.18.12-14) that even if someone or even thousands of people become liberated from the material worlds, as when those who have achieved Brahmaloaka are liberated with Brahma, the inconceivable Supreme Lord manifests additional living beings [from the unlimited stock of unmanifested or sleeping souls] in the next *maha kalpa* and thus keeps the material worlds full.

This is similar to the statement of Sri Haridasa Thakura to Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, in the *Chaitanya-caritamrita (Antya-lila, 3.78-79)*, that even if the Lord sends to the spiritual world all the developed living entities in different species, still He will awaken the living beings who are not yet developed and engage them in activities. Thus, the universe will again become filled as before.

THE NATURE AND INDEPENDENCE OF THE SPIRIT SOULS

Although the *jiva* souls are spiritual in nature, why do some souls turn toward *maya* after being manifested? This was the question asked by Vrajanatha in Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur's *Jaiva Dharma* (Volume Three, Chapter 16, page 91). In the book, Bhaktivinoda Thakur explains the answer by way of the reply from Babaji, another character in the book. He explains that the qualities of the Lord are present in a very small degree in the spirit souls. Because the Lord has independence and free will, the *jiva* souls also have a small quantity of eternal free will. However, although the *jivas* are independent, they cannot do everything they want like Krishna can. For the *jivas*, proper use of free will is seen when the soul favorably serves Krishna, while a misuse of free will is recognized when the soul turns away from Him. Then the soul tries to enjoy *maya*. Then the pure spirit soul becomes covered over by five kinds of ignorance so that he can pretend to be something other than what he really is.

Vrajanatha then asks why the Lord made the tiny souls so weak that they fall into *maya*. Babaji responds, saying that Krishna is merciful and also playful. He desires many kinds of pastimes with the individual souls in a variety of conditions. So He creates many exalted conditions, such as those in the spiritual world, as well as many degraded situations as found in the material worlds. In this way, by the influence of *maya*, there is a descent into the lower depths of consciousness. And on the higher level, by the help of Sri Radha, the personification of the *hladini-shakti*, Krishna's bliss potency, there is the attainment of unlimited spiritual bliss. However, the souls that enter *maya*'s depths lose interest in serving God and in understanding their spiritual nature. They are only interested in their own selfish pleasure. Nonetheless, the Lord sends His own personal representatives from the spiritual world to make these souls favorable to Him and turn them toward the spiritual atmosphere.

When Krishna sees how the *jiva* souls enter the material worlds, He weeps to see how they are suffering. He even follows them into the material world, which He does out of His causeless mercy. He does this in two ways; through His numerous incarnations called *avatars*, and by expanding Himself into the Supersoul to accompany each and every *jiva* through material existence. In order to give them the chance to witness His spiritual pastimes, He brings His

liberated devotees into this world to exhibit His nectarean pastimes in His various incarnations for the world to see. This helps awaken those who are receptive to their dormant devotion to the Lord, and brings them to the spiritual dimension.

Which way the independent *jiva* souls turn is never forced. It is up to their own free will. This free will, however, is a precious gift. It is one of the eternal qualities of the spirit. It is what allows them to choose whatever way they wish to exist. This is further described in a very enlightening way by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur in his book, *Brahmana and Vaishnava* (Second Chapter, p. 86):

Before acquiring material designations, the living entity is supremely pure. Even though he is not engaged in serving the Supreme Lord, he remains situated in the neutral position of *santa-rasa* due to his marginal nature. Though the living entity, born from the marginal potency, does not at that time exhibit a taste for serving the Lord due to a lack of knowledge of self-realization, his direct propensity of serving the Supreme Lord nevertheless remains within him in a dormant state. Though the indirect propensity of material enjoyment, which is contrary to the service of the Lord, is not found in him at that time, indifference to the service of Hari and the seed of material enjoyment, which follows that state of indifference, are nevertheless present within him.

The living entity, who belongs to the marginal potency, cannot remain indifferent forever by subduing both devotional and nondevotional propensities. He therefore contemplates unconstitutional activities from his marginal position. As a sleeping person dreams that he is active in the physical world without actually being involved in activities, when the dormant, indifferent living entity of the marginal potency exhibits even a little apathy to the service of the Supreme Lord and situates himself in a neutral, unchanging condition for even a little time, he is infected by impersonalism. That is why the conditioned soul desires to merge in the impersonal Brahman, thus exhibiting his mind=s fickle nature. But due to neglecting the eternal service of the Lord and thereby developing the quality of aversion to the Lord, he cannot remain fixed in that position. In this way, aversion to the Lord breaks his concentration of mind and establishes him as the master of this world of enjoyment.

Maya, the external energy of the Supreme Lord, then induces the marginal living entity to enjoy this world through her covering and throwing potencies, and, thus, shows the living entity the reality of being averse to the Lord=s service.

So this description explains that due to the living being remaining in a neutral position, he does not exhibit the natural spiritual taste for serving Krishna, which is in a dormant state. He also exhibits indifference to the material world and its enjoyment at first. However, since he cannot remain in a state of inactivity and indifference for long, he contemplates material activities and the enjoyment they might offer. Then *maya* induces the living entity to try to enjoy the world.

It is explained that *maya* is the reflection of the Lord=s internal potency. She is a perverted manifestation of the Lord=s pure, spiritual energy. The purpose of *maya* is to purify the rebellious souls who are averse to service to the Lord. She provides a way they can reform, and

keeps the defiant away from the spiritual domain by keeping them pre-occupied with material activities. Troublesome concerns and worries are their punishment. The world of *maya* is their prison, from which there is no escape. They simply remain chasing after the illusory pleasures lifetime after lifetime. Nonetheless, as it is out of kindness that a king sends a criminal to prison, not only for the criminal but also for the law abiding citizens. It also is out of kindness that the Lord sends the materially inclined living beings to the world of *maya* so they may work out their desires and one day realize the futility of finding any long term contentment through such measures and that true happiness lies in the spiritual domain in the association of the Supreme Being.¹¹ (*Jaiva Dharma*, Volume 3, Chapter 16, p. 94)

As further described by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur in his book, *Brahmana and Vaishnava* (Second Chapter, p. 86), when the living being first enters the material worlds, he often appears in the form of Lord Brahma:

At that time the living entity considers himself the king of enjoyers, and being situated in the mode of passion, he takes the position of Brahma and creates progeny. The living entities who are born from Brahma, the grandfather of everyone, expand themselves in families of Aryans and *brahmanas*. In this world of duality, however, living entities who are covered and thrown under the control of the external energy naturally become envious. This enviousness further creates pride, illusion, greed, anger, and lust, and induces the living entities to dance frantically in aversion to the Lord. At that time they forget both that they were born from Grandfather Brahma and the Lord's instructions in the *Vedas*.

One thing we need to understand is that both God and the living beings are full of desires. This is another way they are similar to each other. This explained more completely by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur in his *Jaiva Dharma* (Volume 3, Chapter 15, p.80):

The Supreme Personality of Godhead is consciousness, a knower, an enjoyer, a thinker, self-manifested, and visible to others. He is also the knower of all fields of activity and He is full of [spiritual] desires. The individual spirit soul is also consciousness, a knower, an enjoyer, a thinker, self-manifested, and visible to others. He is also the knower of a field of activity [his or her own body] and he is also full of desires. Because He is the master of all potencies, the Supreme Personality of Godhead has these qualities to the highest degree. On the other hand, the individual spirit soul, possessing only very slight power, has these qualities in a very slight degree. Although they are different in the sense that one is perfect and complete and the other is very small and atomic, the Supreme and the individual spirit soul are alike in that they both possess these qualities. The Supreme Personality of Godhead is the master of all potencies. He is the controller of the *svarupa-shakti* (internal potency), *jiva-shakti* (the marginal potency), and *maya-shakti* (the energy of the material nature). These potencies are all His obedient maidservants. He is their master. Whatever He wishes, they do. That is the nature of the Supreme Being. The individual spirit soul has a very tiny drop of these qualities. He is subordinate to the Lord's other potencies.

This shows the difference and similarity between the Lord and the small *jiva* souls. However, the point is that we all long for pleasure, as high a pleasure as we can reach. The reason for that is because the source from which we have emanated is fully powerful in all pleasure. The individual soul is originally a part of the pleasure potency. It is our right to acquire that pleasure and be happy. And the highest pleasure is found in loving relationships. We simply have to realize that real love is in association with the Supreme Being in the eternal, spiritual world. Whatever love we usually encounter in the material world is often but a limited or perverted reflection of what we wish to find. Therefore, it lacks continuity and fulfillment, and leaves us wishing and searching for something more substantial. Such deep love is only found on the spiritual platform.

At this point we should further understand that although the individual *jiva* souls are manifested from the *jiva-shakti* of Lord Krishna, the *jiva-shakti* is counted among Lord Krishna=s incomplete potencies, or the *apurna-shakti*. From this incomplete potency all the individual souls, the atomic fragments of consciousness, are manifested. Thus, the individual spirit souls are not eternally perfect, but they can become perfect (*sadhana-siddha*) by engaging in the activities of devotional service (*sadhana*). Afterwards they can enjoy spiritual bliss like that enjoyed by the eternally perfect (*nitya-siddha*) beings.¹¹

In the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (3.3.26,pur.), His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami describes the differences between the *nitya-siddha* and the *sadhana-siddha* devotees. He explains that the *nitya-siddha* devotees never fall down into the material atmosphere, even though they may sometimes appear in the material worlds in order to carry out the mission of the Lord. The *sadhana-siddha* devotees are the perfected souls from among the conditioned beings. Even amongst these there are pure and mixed devotees. Pure devotees are free from all materialistic tendencies, and the mixed devotees sometimes are eager for fruitive activities or philosophical speculation.

It is further explained that *nitya-siddha* devotees may also come from Vaikuntha to this material world to teach by their personal example and allow conditioned souls the means to advance spiritually. Such a devotee comes to the material world upon the order of the Supreme Being, and are never allured by whatever temporary pleasures this world has to offer.¹²

An example of this is found in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (10.8.49) wherein the devotees who play the part of Lord Krishna=s eternal father and mother are praying to appear on planet earth knowing that after they appear, Krishna will also soon descend in order to display His pastimes with His devotees. This means that devotees who play such intimate parts in the activities of Lord Krishna are already designated. Therefore, those living entities who have perfected themselves to become *sadhana-siddhas* can never become Krishna=s father or mother, or His consort or most special friends, but they can attain the same affection for the Lord. Thus, they can also participate in similar pastimes to which they are most attracted. In this way, the conditioned souls in the prison of *maya* can rectify themselves and return to the spiritual dimension where there is plenty of room for everyone. Through such affectionate reciprocation between the Lord and His devotees, the Lord=s pleasure is increased, and, likewise, the pleasure of the devotees is expanded millions of times more. Thus, there is no limit to the transcendental bliss that exists in the spiritual world.

A FALL FROM THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

Those who have a direct and eternal relationship with the Lord, whose numbers are limitless, either in Goloka or in the Vaikuntha planets, do not even know that a potency called *maya-shakti* exists. They are eternally liberated and know nothing of the suffering and material or selfish pleasure that goes on within the material worlds. They only taste the nectar, pleasure and bliss of worshiping and serving the Lord. They have no inclination except toward spiritual things and seek nothing but the happiness of serving the Lord. They are always protected by their spiritual strength and never touch *maya*.¹³ This is the condition and sentiment of the *nitya-siddhas*, or eternally liberated devotees. Thus, they never have any connections with *maya*.

Although many Vedic texts explain that upon reaching the spiritual world no one ever falls down into *maya*, there is evidence that such is a possibility, although extremely rare. It is explicitly related that even when one is liberated, the soul is capable of coming under *maya*'s control.¹⁴ So how is this possible?

One point to which we may want to refer is made by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur in his book, *Brahmana and Vaishnava* (Second Chapter, p. 86), wherein he states: "Before acquiring material designations, the living entity is supremely pure. Even though he is not engaged in serving the Supreme Lord, he remains situated in the neutral position of *santa-rasa* due to his marginal nature."

Although this is in reference to the origin of the spirit soul, nonetheless, it does provide a hint of the condition of the soul that may indeed fall from the spiritual world. The pure state of the living being would be in reference to only two conditions; when the soul is manifested without the karmic contamination from associating with the material worlds of *maya*, and that found in the purely transcendental atmosphere within the spiritual worlds. Nonetheless, the point about being in the neutral state of *santa-rasa* could be worth noticing, since it is this platform, which he mentions, from which the living being can fall into the world of *maya*. This would indicate that only those souls within the *santa-rasa*, or relationship of neutrality, are at all capable of falling from the spiritual world into material existence.

This explanation also seems to concur with that given by Srila A. C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (3.25.29, pur.): "Sometimes it is asked how the living entity falls down from the spiritual world to the material world. Here is the answer. Unless one is elevated to the Vaikuntha planets, directly in touch with the Supreme Personality of Godhead, he is prone to fall down, either from the impersonal Brahman realization or from an ecstatic trance of meditation."

So how can such a fall take place? One example is the servant of Lord Chaitanya, Kala Krishnadasa, who was allured from the direct association of the Lord by the female Bhattatharis during the Lord's tour of South India. Some people may feel that this is only a pastime, but Srila A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami mentions in his purport in the *Caitanya-caritamrita* (*Madhya-lila*, 10.65): "This is factual evidence showing that it is possible at any time to fall down from the Lord's association. One need only misuse his little independence. Once fallen and separated from the Supreme Personality of Godhead's association, one becomes a candidate for suffering in the material world."

So this means that we all have free will at any time to decide in which kind of engagements we wish to pursue, depending on our state of consciousness. Another example is that of Jaya and Vijaya as described in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (3.16.2). Therein, when the

Kumara brothers wanted entrance into the Vaikuntha region, they were denied entrance by the guards, Jaya and Vijaya. The Kumaras then cursed the guards to take birth in the material world. The reason was because the guards could not tell who was a qualified devotee and who was not. Lord Vishnu later pointed out that it was because they had ignored Him that this had happened. It was further revealed that they had previously detained the Goddess of Fortune herself at the doors to Vaikuntha when she was returning once after having left the spiritual kingdom. Thus, at that instance Jaya and Vijay committed a grave offense and became affected by duality in the same way as they did with the Kumaras. When the spirit soul is affected by duality, it must then go to the realm of duality, which is the material world. Later, it became evident that the Lord wanted to use Jaya and Vijaya in His pastimes in the material world and arranged a situation in which they would enter the material domain to participate. Nonetheless, it is an example of how the independence can be misused, forcing one to leave the spiritual world.

However, let me reiterate that such a situation and tendency to leave the spiritual domain after having reached it is practically nonexistent. The happiness and pleasure that one becomes absorbed in within the spiritual atmosphere and in connection with the Supreme Being become the dominant feature of one=s existence so that any other lesser attraction never even enters one=s awareness. It is simply too minuscule to distract one away from the bliss of spiritual life and one=s relationship with the Supreme Being. Furthermore, the conclusion is also established by Lord Krishna Himself who declares in the *Bhagavad-gita* that a person who returns to the spiritual world never takes birth in the material creation again. He or she has no more business with the material manifestation.

The point is that in the spiritual world everyone has a spiritual body, and there is no conception of material existence. There is only spiritual service given by the *jiva* souls and the receiving of service by the Supreme Being. There is only *sevya*, *seva*, and *sevaka*—the person served, the process of service, and the servant.¹⁵ If there is any disturbance or change of attitude in any *jiva* soul, the Lord gives that being all facility for his own particular preferences or pursuits by allowing him to enter the land of duality and imagination, which is the material creation. However, as I have said, such occurrences among the innumerable *jivas* in the spiritual worlds are practically non-existent.

If a being does have a change of character or inclination for some reason, when beginning to fall from their spiritual position, the *jiva* souls exhibit an extremely subtle change of disposition. They are first attracted to their independence, their free will to decide to do something or not to do something. They begin to think in terms that one service is favorable and something else may be less favorable, or what is likeable and unlikeable. In other words, they begin to think in terms of their own enjoyment. It is this subtle diversion in which the living being begins to display the symptoms of wanting to enjoy according to one=s own preferences, or outside of the association with God. In the spiritual strata this is most unusual and a form of duality. It is a type of rebellion against the eternal service of the Lord, which is the real purpose of their existence and situation in the spiritual world. Once that service is interrupted, then they are no longer engaged in their natural tendency. Not only does it disrupt their own spiritual life, but also that of others around them. Therefore, rather than have such *jivas* cause disturbances in the natural flow of spiritual and loving exchanges between the Lord and His devotees, the Lord allows the nonconformist to enter the material realm where all of the other rebellious beings can play and act out their desires to their heart=s content, or at least try.

When this happens, it is not that *maya* has entered the spiritual world to affect this

particular entity, but it is more like his consciousness has gone to the realm of duality, the realm of *maya*. This is where the illusory energy provides the playground for those who think they can find their own form of enjoyment or pleasure outside of the spiritual strata, outside of the association of God. And it is that consciousness which, thus, immediately takes the person to *maya=s* realm. It is automatic and immediate, based on the free will of the living entity.

In any case, it is the marginal nature of the *jiva* to be pure or impure through the proper use or misuse of his independence, in whatever situation he is found. When there is a distortion in his proper functional nature, the *jiva* becomes impure, and thus qualified to be brought to the material plane, devoid of spiritual shelter. Through such association with the material energy, the *jiva* forgets his service to Krishna. When this happens he begins to imagine his pursuits and identity in any number of personas. In this way, the process of repeated birth and death open up for him until he again looks toward the Supreme for shelter.

* * *

It is often said that the original nature and identity of the living being is spiritual, and that our original home is also in the spiritual domain. For example, the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (4.28.54) states: AMy dear gentle friend, both you and I are exactly like two swans. We live together in the same heart, which is just like the Manasa Lake. Although we have been living together for many thousands of years, we are still far away from our original home.@

In the purport to this verse, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami explains that this verse refers to the spiritual world as the original home of the living beings and the Supreme Lord. While there, they all share a very peaceful and blissful life. However, when the living being wants to enjoy himself in something other than service, or separate from the Lord, which is not his nature anymore than a fish living outside of water, then he falls into the material world. As soon as one feels a little envy of the Lord, or a desire to be served similar to the Lord, then he must leave the spiritual kingdom because no envy of the Lord exists in the spiritual world. The choice to love God or not always exists within each of us. And without such love, the living being becomes conditioned and may go on like that for millenniums.

So this is the key to a misuse of independence and free will. When the living beings desire to enjoy themselves separate from the Supreme, they develop duality in their consciousness, as described above. Then they tend to disregard the devotional service of the Lord. Thus, the living beings fall from the spiritual strata. However, in the spiritual kingdom this is extremely rare, and is why it is said that once one enters the spiritual domain, he never falls again into material existence.

The natural function of the living entity, and his purpose in the spiritual world with the Lord, is to serve and enjoy the loving relationship with the Supreme. Krishna is the Supreme Enjoyer, and the living being is meant to be enjoyed by the Lord. In that way there is an intense exchange of love and happiness between the *jiva* and the Lord. However, when the *jiva* soul begins to feel that something else is more important, or worse, feels that he would like the same attention as the Lord, or even wants to compete with, imitate, or be the Lord, then this is not possible, except in one=s imagination. And the freedom to imagine such things is provided only on the material platform. This is also the mercy of the Lord to allow the living being the freedom to pursue his imaginations and desires. Thus, the Lord also accompanies the living being as the

Supersoul. By this means, the living being may one day regain his senses and turn back toward the spiritual strata and service to God.¹⁶

So due to free will and independence, the possibility to fall may always be there, but the relationship with Krishna is never lost, and is what keeps one from falling when it is qualitatively reestablished. So in one sense, the fall is superficial because one's relationship with God is never broken, although it may seem to be while one is in the material worlds, affected by forgetfulness and covered by the subtle and gross bodies. But such a fall of a devotee who is in a direct relationship with Krishna is practically impossible. Usually anyone who has developed his relationship with Krishna never falls down in any circumstance. It is always more blissful to be enjoyed by God for the love and service that you do than trying to enjoy the dull material mind and senses.

* * *

While in the material world, if the living being gives up the material embodiment and by the practice of devotional service enters back into the spiritual dimension, he will revive his spiritual body. In his spiritual form he can see the Supreme Lord face to face. He will be able to hear and speak to Him and understand Him as He is.¹⁷ As it is explained, "Just as gold when smelted by fire, gives up its impurity and again takes on its own form, similarly the soul, shaking off the contamination of *karma* by the practice of *bhakti-yoga*, attains to Me."¹⁸

As further described by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur in his book, *Brahmana and Vaishnava* (Second Chapter, p. 86), "On that platform of progress, if a living entity cultivates transcendental sound vibration [the chanting of Krishna's holy names] and revives the process of remembering the lotus feet of Sri Krishna, he then achieves scientific, spiritual knowledge. By this process, all *anarthas* [unwanted obstacles to devotional service] are destroyed and he becomes situated in a supremely auspicious position."

In this way, by the practice of the spiritual process, one can become purified to return to the spiritual world. Even though *maya* ensnares the insincere and conditioned souls, when the *jiva* devotes himself to serving the Lord, *maya* manifests her mode of goodness, the *sattva-guna*, to help him on his way back to the spiritual world and gives him knowledge about Krishna.

Then, as explained in *Krishna Book* (Chapter Twenty-Eight) by Srila A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, for those who become perfect in their practice of *bhakti-yoga*, in their next life they are immediately transferred to the universe where Krishna is appearing. As long as the material manifestation exists, Lord Krishna circulates through each universe to attract the conditioned souls. So as devotees become qualified, they enter whatever universe in which Krishna is displaying His pastimes to offer their assistance and become completely perfect. Thus, they get their first chance to associate with Krishna directly, just before returning to their activities in the spiritual world.

When one returns to the spiritual world, he hardly remembers his experience in the material realm. It is like a vague, bad dream noted mostly for being separated from and forgetful of God. You can't have the kingdom of God without Him. Thus, upon returning, no one ever falls back down from the spiritual world. Just as once a child experiences the pain of putting his hand in a fire, he would have to be quite retarded to try it again to see if it still causes pain. In the same way, once attaining the spiritual world, no one returns to the material domain.

WHY THE LORD CREATES THE JIVA SOULS

At this point, we could ask why the Lord bothers to create the small *jiva* souls at all. One reason is that the Lord performs various pastimes, and displaying His material energy for the materially conditioned souls is one of them. He is Lord of all, within both the eternal spiritual potency as well as the temporary material energy. However, the individual soul being in the material energy is not the fault of God, but it is the choice of the *jiva* soul who wants such an existence.

Another explanation why the Lord creates the *jiva* sparks is that the Lord is omnipotent and displays both His limited and unlimited potencies. To be omnipotent, He must display both potencies, not merely one. The living beings have only limited potency, although they are part of the Lord and of the same quality. Furthermore, He is the Lord of all beings. If there were no one to control, the concept of the supreme controller, or God, would have no meaning, just as a king without subjects has no significance. Thus, for the Lord to be the supreme controller there must be a creation to control. Such creation is displayed in the manifestation of both the spiritual and material worlds. The basic purpose of life is for the spiritual pleasure of both God and the living beings. The Lord displays His pleasure potency as the innumerable living entities. In this way, He is the reservoir of all pleasures and all forms of enjoyment, both spiritual and material. Everything comes from Him. Because He wants to enjoy pleasure, there must be energies to give Him pleasure or supply the impetus for pleasure. This is why there is the manifestation of the *jivas*. This is the understanding of the Absolute Truth.¹⁹

A further explanation is that the Supreme Absolute Truth is complete when He is both infinite and infinitesimal. If He is infinite only, then he is not complete. The infinite portion of the Supreme is the Lord Himself, the *Vishnu-tattva*, while the infinitesimal portion is the living entity, the *jiva*.

Because the Lord has infinite desires for transcendental activities and pleasure, there is existence in the spiritual world. And due to the tiny desires of the living entities, there is existence within the material energy. In this way, the infinitesimal *jiva* souls are simply a complimentary portion of the Supreme. Thus, it is essential that the Infinite have infinitesimal portions which are His parts and parcels, and between which there is an eternal relationship. That relationship manifests in many levels of spiritual loving reciprocation. Without the Lord's parts and parcels, the Supreme Being would have been inactive, and there would be no variegatedness in spiritual life, and no need for a material creation for the desires of the conditioned living beings, which we see all around us right now. So if there was no God, or if He was inactive with no *jiva* souls, there would be no material manifestation because there simply would be no need for it. However, as we can see, all life is full of activity. God is not merely some impersonal force or Brahman effulgence. And the living beings are not meant simply for merging into a white light or nothingness. As we can see, all living entities are endeavoring to express themselves creatively and through loving relations, or simply trying to survive. This would be useless if their ultimate position was to merely be inactive and merge with a great white light or Brahman. So everything is meant for reaching eternal, spiritual, loving relationships and blissful activities. This is the meaning and purpose of the material creation. Thus, everything we see is but an emanation of that Supreme Absolute Truth. The living beings are but expansions of the active energy of the Supreme Being. And the Supreme Lord is the energetic, or source from which everything else

manifests.²⁰

Without His devotees, the Lord does not desire to enjoy spiritual pastimes and activities, although the Supreme Being is self-sufficient. Those devotees, such as the devotee cowherd boys of Vrindavana, increase His transcendental bliss and are most dear to Him. And such friends also increase in their own spiritual pleasure by serving the Lord. Thus, there is a continued increase in the state of transcendental pleasure that goes on like a competition between the Lord and His devotees. As the devotees increase in the transcendental pleasure they feel in serving the Lord, the Supreme also feels an increase in His own spiritual happiness, which is then reflected back to the devotees. This continues back and forth unlimitedly. Because the Lord is unlimited and wants to increase His devotees unlimitedly, He descends into the material worlds in order to attract the nondevotees and rebellious living beings to give them a chance to regain their spiritual state and return back to their constitutional nature and original home in the spiritual strata.²¹

ENTERING THE MATERIAL EXISTENCE AND BECOMING LIBERATED FROM IT

In summary, the *jiva* is a spiritual, conscious and cognizant being. As a product of the Lord's *tatastha shakti*, or marginal energy, the *jiva* was placed at the confluence of the material and spiritual worlds, from where he observed both realms. Those souls who became slightly attracted to the spiritual energy by knowledge of God, and by contact with such knowledge aspired for transcendence, received spiritual strength from the *hladini-shakti*, the Lord's internal pleasure giving potency. Inspired by this spiritual pleasure, they developed eternal favorable attraction for the Lord, and become admitted as eternal associates of Lord Krishna in the spiritual world.

Others, however, by their own free choice, became enchanted by *maya* lying on the opposite side and became greedy for her and her illusory energy. *Maya* looks attractive to them, so they feel invited and develop attachment to the material world. Thus Maha Vishnu, the Lord of Maya-devi who lies in the casual ocean, allows them to enter into this mundane realm. This is the result of not having any attraction to serving the Supreme Lord, but instead being attracted to material sense enjoyment.

As soon as they enter *maya*'s abode, she covers them with *avidya*, or the nescience potency. Thus, entangled in this illusion, their material absorption increases and drags them down into the whirlpool of karmic reactions.

It is understood that the material nature and the living beings are beginningless²² because both of them are from the energy of the Supreme and exist before the cosmic manifestation. However, it is the material creation that gives those who are attracted to it a chance to be active in it. It also gives the sleeping or dormant conditioned souls a chance to be engaged again. They are the entities that were absorbed within the body of Maha-Vishnu at the time of the universal annihilation.

The materially inclined living beings must have a physical body because the subtle body alone is not enough for them to perform actions. The subtle body is where the desires and consciousness reside, while the physical body allows the conditioned souls to act out those longings. This is the purpose of the material creation.

However, because of the gross physical body, the living beings undergo the six stages of existence, namely birth, growth, maintenance, production of by-products such as children, and

then dwindling and death. The body also feels the pangs of hunger, thirst, heat and cold, and other bodily conditions, and the desires to solve such problems along with the wishes for more pleasure. Thus, pushed by these desires, the soul within the body becomes the obedient servant of the needs of the body. The living entity also becomes the servant of the longings for the association of members of the opposite sex, and other material activities. In this way, he may perform all kinds of pious activities with the hope of attaining heaven, if he is religious. Otherwise, if he is impious, he may simply engage in any activity he chooses with thoughts of nothing but his own selfish pleasure, which will take one farther downward into darkness. In either case, once a person has attained the reactions to his activities and, for example, lived in heaven to use up his good *karma*, or gone through hell to rectify himself of his bad acts, he again eventually returns to accept a human birth to try again. The *Svetashvatara Upanishad* describes it like this:

As the *jiva* soul evolves through the material plane of existence, he or she is subjected to various conditions simply due to their karma. The *Svetashvatara Upanishad* clearly explains this. It says that the *jiva*=s body alone is differentiated by designations of manhood or womanhood. The body he receives is merely a result of his *karma*. The *jiva* is spirit soul in truth. Though the body will place him in certain categories, the physical identification is not his real self. It is through the material desires for touch, sight, eating, drinking, and so on by which the *jiva* enters one body after another in countless species according to this karma. The *jiva* acquires many physical and subtle forms due to the actions caused by particular material qualities to which he becomes attached. Because of these bodies, he becomes covered over by the changing forms, created by the qualities of activity and desire. (*Svetashvatara Upanishad* 5.10-12)

In this way, the person is stuck on the wheel of karma for many lifetimes, directed by his desires for material facility and pleasure. Caught in this trap, the living being suffers and works to reduce his miseries. He works hard to acquire food and drink, to collect money, to attain clothing, and drive away the cold. He may also become married for companionship and then must work hard to increase the happiness of his new family and descendants. He must find doctors and medicines when he and his family are attacked by disease, and he must pay taxes and protect his property, and so on. In such endeavors, the soul becomes tossed around by such feelings as lust, anger, greed, pride, envy, and bewilderment. Thus, the materially inclined living being thinks he is enjoying while working so hard.²³ This sort of pleasure is compared to the camel who loves the taste it gets from eating the branches of the thorny bush, not realizing that what he is relishing is the taste of his own blood.

The main reason for these sorts of activities and the suffering of the conditioned soul is due to the forgetfulness of one=s spiritual identity as an eternally blissful servant of God.²⁴ Because of this, the conditioned living being engages in activities meant to solve his problems that only lead him deeper into karmic bondage in material existence.

The whole trouble for the living beings while in the material world is that he is attached to the concept of being independent and free from the influence of any controller above him. This is actually illusion because the living being is subjected to many influences around him which keep him under control. Thus, he continues to be entangled in material existence because he does not know how to get free.²⁵

The *karma* of fruitive activities is also considered without a beginning because it is manifested simultaneously from the *mahat-tattva*, the ingredients of the material creation, as when time agitates *avidya* (ignorance) and *jnana* (knowledge of the impersonal). From karma,

the modes of goodness and passion are manifested, which then produces knowledge and action, and then all other aspects of the creation begin to manifest. Thus, karma is a key ingredient in material nature which has existed within Maha-Vishnu with all the other aspects of material nature.²⁶

Another consideration for how karma is without a beginning, and how the *jiva*=s aversion to God is also beyond the scope of time, is explained by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur in his *Sri Caitanya Sikshamrita* (p. 185): A. . . many cannot understand distinctly how karma has no beginning. Time pertaining to matter is only material reflection of [spiritual] *chit*-time and is a material thing suited to the performance of karma. [The] *jiva* takes recourse to *chit* i.e., transcendental everlasting time in Vaikuntha, where there is no past and future; only the present exists. When the *jiva* in bondage enters in material time, [he] becomes subject to past, future, and present, and being server of *tri-kala* [material time] suffers pleasure and pain. Material time operating from *chit-kala* [spiritual time] and *chit-kala* having no beginning, the origin of the *jiva*=s karma i.e., aversion to God, is coming even prior to material time. Therefore, judged impartially with regard to *jada-kala*, the root of karma lies prior to this time and therefore karma has been designated as *anadi* i.e., without any beginning.@

Regarding time in the spiritual world, we should make one comment for clarification, that understanding spiritual time is beyond material logic and cannot be understood because it is outside our experience. At best we can say that time and space in the spiritual world is different from that found in the material worlds. Material time is divided by past, present, and future due to the agitation of the modes of nature. In the spiritual world time is not broken up like that. There time is in an ever-present state. There is only the eternal now. In the spiritual realm things do not come into being, nor do they end. Everything exists in an eternal present. While living in the material realm, we try to describe the manifestation of the *jiva* souls as, AThe spirit souls were created,@ or Athe individual souls were imprisoned by *maya*,@ and so on. This only shows how much we are influenced by our material conditioning. And we will continue to talk in this way while remaining influenced by the limiting factors of our existence in *maya*. We have to understand things from beyond the limits of material logic. Only then we may get a glimpse of understanding that the spiritual world is eternal and we also are eternal beings. By taking to the spiritual process seriously, it can prepare our consciousness for perceiving higher realms and loftier states of being. The more we understand the Truth that exists beyond the limitations of the illusory world, the more we will perceive our own spiritual identity, which is beyond all time and matter.²⁷

So in time, the *jiva* may begin to question his existence. He may feel like he is not satisfied and ask why he is suffering in this material world though trying to find happiness. He may long for crossing over the ocean of material life and find a more substantial realm of reality. In this way, the living being advances in intelligence and becomes qualified for hearing about spiritual knowledge. After the accumulation of many lifetimes of pious activities, one may have the good fortune to respect and seek out the association with saintly devotees of the Lord.

If one is truly fortunate, he may learn how to cross over the ocean of material existence by getting the opportunity to associate with a pure devotee who can revive one=s spiritual awareness. As the *Svetashvatara Upanishad* (5.13) explains, the *jivas* become captive by *maya* and material existence. However, if by chance the association awakens their faith, then gradually their devotional attitudes are enhanced. This endows them with knowledge of the Supersoul who is beginning less, endless, the seed of all incarnations, the creator of the cosmic

manifestation and who resides within it. Thus enlightened, the *jiva* can become liberated from *maya=s* grip.

Thus, like a log floating down a river, one finally reaches the shore to be released from being pushed this way and that by the material energy.

Thereafter, if the *jiva* accepts instructions from the representative of the Lord, and from the Vedic literature, he can understand his real position as a spiritual being. His spiritual interest will increase and he may then engage in the devotional service of the Lord. Being nourished by good association, faith, and respect for saintly devotees, the *jiva=s* material proclivities become weakened. This can go on to produce steadiness in devotional service to the Lord, chanting His holy names, eradication of unwanted desires, and finally attraction for the Lord Krishna. When finally the *jiva* beholds the object of his worship, the Supreme Lord, his distress is dissipated and he is enlightened with the realization of his eternal identity as Krishna=s servant. (*Svetashvatara Upanishad* 4.7)

The main limbs of this devotional service to the Lord are explained in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (7.5.23-24) by Prahlada Maharaja: A Hearing and chanting about the transcendental holy name, form, qualities, paraphernalia and pastimes of Lord Vishnu, remembering them, serving the lotus feet of the Lord, offering the Lord respectful worship with sixteen types of paraphernalia, offering prayers to the Lord, becoming His servant, considering the Lord one=s best friend, and surrendering everything unto the Lord (with body, mind and words). These nine processes are accepted as pure devotional service. One who has dedicated his life to the service of Krishna through these nine methods should be understood to be the most learned person, for he has acquired complete knowledge. @

It should be noted that even one of the above process performed perfectly is all that it takes to return to the spiritual abode of the Lord.

In this way, with serious intention, a person can attain liberation from this material world. Such liberation is described in the *Chandogya Upanishad* (8.12.3): A The *jiva*, upon attaining liberation, elevates himself out of his gross and subtle material bodies and shining with transcendental brilliance obtains his own supra mundane, spiritual form. Such a liberated soul is the best among men. He relishes his presence in the spiritual realm, enjoying transcendental activities and absorbing himself in divine bliss. @

Upon attaining liberation, the *jiva* soul can experience his real nature, as described in the *Chandogya Upanishad* (8.7.1,3). The pure soul is without sin and free from all karmic reactions. Material nature has no influence on him, so he is ever-fresh and youthful, without age. He has no material hankering, anxiety or lamentation, thus he is equipoised and peaceful. He has no desires other than engaging in spiritual service to the Supreme. In his spiritual nature, it is only service to God that he desires, which he does most favorably.

Once a devotee is liberated, there are two types of liberation which he or she may attain. These are attaining the original spiritual form (*svarupa-mukti*), and attaining the lotus feet of Lord Krishna (*vastu-mukti*). Such elevated devotees who have realized their original position do not have to wait until they are free of their material bodies, but are already being served by *mukti*, or liberation personified. Although their bodies may participate in the principles of the material elements, their souls are immersed in sublime bliss in the spiritual realm. Thus, having already attained their spiritual forms, they will certainly attain the lotus feet of Krishna upon leaving their body.

However, when it comes to liberation, a devotee is not overly interested in that. As Srila

Rupa Gosvami explains in his *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu*: A Devotional service, beginning with hearing and chanting, mitigates material distress and almost simultaneously produces a sense of good fortune. Then follows the realization that liberation is simply an insignificant side effect, and that regulated devotional service, marked by an overt adherence to scriptural rules and regulations, will not reward the ultimate necessity of life. *krishna prema* [advanced love for Krishna]. However, *raga-bhakti*, spontaneous devotional service, awards *krishna prema*. The two symptoms of *raga-bhakti* are intense, deep bliss and constant attraction for Lord Krishna, which Krishna himself finds attractive. (B.r.s. 1.17) This is how a devotee attracts Lord Krishna. Or how the infinitesimal attracts the Infinite to reveal Himself.

The nature of this *krishna-prema*, or love of God, is also described by Srila Rupa Gosvami in his *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu*: A When devotional service is situated on the transcendental platform of pure goodness, it is like a ray of the sunlight of love for Krishna. At such a time, devotional service causes the heart to be softened by various tastes that are called *bhava* (spiritual emotion). (B.r.s 173.1) When that *bhava* softens the heart completely, it becomes endowed with a great feeling of possessiveness in relationship to the Lord. When it becomes very much condensed and intensified, learned scholars call it *prema*, love of God. (B.r.s 174.1)

The first stage of this *prema* is called *rati*, which is transcendental attachment in love, while *prema* is the concentrated form of this attachment, *rati*. This transcendental attachment in love is a natural part of the consciousness of the living being. But while in the material world, this attachment comes out as a perverted reflection, which takes shape as love for various material objects or persons. However, this love is actually lust, which means the love one has for something for pleasing one's own mind and senses. Without a good return of affection, the love decreases or worse, turns into anger. But the natural love in the soul is ever-increasing, shining without burning, and without the need for a return of favors.

The soul's nature is to love and be loved. So it cannot find complete happiness without this form of exchange. But the only place where this can be fully tasted is in the spiritual domain, and in a relationship with the Lord, the Supreme Lover and Supreme Lovable Object. That is when we reach *krishna-prema*.

This *prema* is of two kinds: *kevala-prema* (unalloyed and unconditional love) and *mahim-jnana-yukta-prema* (love mixed with knowledge, awe and reverential worship). The goal of *sadhana* (practice) on the *raganuga-bhakti* path is primarily *kevala-prema*. According to the teachings of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, *kevala-prema*, unalloyed devotional surrender, is the pinnacle of all attainments and goals. Yet, *kevala-prema* is further subdivided as: *bhavottha* (sprung from *bhava*) and *prasadotha* (invoked from mercy). Further sub-divisions of *bhavottha* are: *vaidhi* (developed from practice) and *raganuga* (developed spontaneously). *Prasadotha* is extremely rare, while *bhavottha-prema* is more common and is described in the *Caitanya-caritamrita* (Madhya-lila, 23.9-13, 39). This is also the direct formula for attaining the supreme goal of life after having entered the material realm:

A If by good fortune a living entity develops faith in Krishna, he begins to associate with devotees. Inspired by devotee association, he begins the process of devotional service by hearing and chanting [the glories and names of Krishna] which cleanses his heart of all unwanted contamination. Freed from all contamination, his devotion advances to the stage of firm, undeviating faith. When firm faith awakens, taste for hearing and chanting blossoms. From taste for devotional service arises deep attachment, leading to the appearance in the heart of the seed

of love of Godhead, which begins to grow. When that stage of ecstasy intensifies, it is called love of Godhead, *prema*. This is the prime human necessity, life's ultimate goal and the reservoir of all pleasure. Even the most learned man could not understand the words, activities and symptoms of a person situated in love of Godhead.®

As Srila Bhaktivioda Thakura further explains in his *Dasa-mula-tattva*, A Love, in this way, becomes an unlimited ocean producing endless waves of ecstasy, embodying transcendental pastimes which continually emanate the ambrosial relish of Krishna, the icon of eternity, absolute knowledge and bliss. By the innate nature of *prema*, it generates extraordinary sublimely blissful *rasa*, spiritual relish, for Sri Krishna. The holy name of Krishna is the manifestation and embodiment of his all-attractive energy. The form of His holy name is the dark complexioned, concentrated form of pure bliss, the ambrosia of immortality and the perennial spring of love. Krishna, the beau of all the exquisite damsels of Vrindavana, is endowed with absolute unlimited compassion that is solely for the benefit of others, and He always remains the boundless reservoir of sublime relish and wonderful pastimes. Krishna, the darling of every entity's heart, is directly perceived through His manifestation as the holy name, His form, qualities and pastimes. That person who enjoys with Krishna in His forest of Vrindavana is, according to the *Kena Upanishad*, an extremely fortunate and super-intelligent being.®

In this way, the living being who enters the material worlds can find his or her way out. By following the path described herein, they can reach the ultimate spiritual abode wherein they can taste the transcendental pleasure that will occupy their consciousness to such a degree that they will lose all awareness of the material energy and any of its so-called attractions. Thus, they will have returned to their real home in the company of the Supreme Being, Sri Krishna, and His eternal associates.

CONCLUSION

So who am I and where did I come from? This question should be much easier to answer after reading this chapter. We are all atomic particles of the supreme spiritual sun of the Lord. We possess consciousness and a spiritual identity, which contains a drop of the highest spiritual bliss. Our spiritual form is made of a tiny fragment of spirit and is somewhat like the form of Lord Krishna. Our misfortune is that we cannot see our spiritual form. However, because we are now aware of it and want to see it means that we have become fortunate. Understanding this is the primary purpose of human existence.²⁹

By understanding our spiritual identity, as summarily described above, we can also perceive that we are actually beyond the labels of being liberated or in material bondage, as explained in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (11.11.1): A The Supreme Lord said: The terms >bound= and >liberated= are an explanation from the modes of nature, not from real substance. Because *maya* is the root of the modes [and I am the Lord of *maya*], there is no liberation or bondage for Me.®

These may be the words of the Supreme as they apply to Him, but they also apply to the individual souls as well. If we are spiritual beings, then, ultimately, bondage and liberation have no substantiality. The soul is not bound or liberated in substance, but only by the temporary association with the material modes, which means that such designations are also impermanent. Since the modes of nature are based on *maya*, there is no actual bondage. It is only a perception,

not an actuality. Thus, there is also no liberation. The soul is never penetrated by the modes, or *maya*. It is purely spiritual. It is only the individual consciousness that surrounds the soul, so to speak, which is affected like one in a dream. Therefore, the goal of life is to become spiritually awakened, purify our consciousness to become free from our false perceptions, and return to the spiritual strata and the association of, and service to, the Supreme Being. In this way, material existence comes to an end after attaining love of God.

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