



## WHAT IS ISKCON?

The International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness was formed in July, 1966 by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swāmī Prabhupāda and a number of his American students. ISKCON is composed of devotees. Devotees are held together by mutual agreement to accept the principles of Bhakti-yogā or devotional service as the goal of life. By mutual endeavor, the entire Society concentrates on Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Personality of Godhead, while engaged in various tasks, cooking, eating, working in an office or chanting the Holy Names in the city streets. A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swāmī is a pure devotee, and those disciples who sincerely follow his instructions have every chance of becoming pure devotees themselves. The initiated devotees in each center live in urban commune settings (with the one exception of New

Vrindaban, ISKCON's *ashram* of homes, temples, farm land and cows in the hills of West Virginia), and are freeing themselves from the conditions of birth, death, disease and old age by fixing their minds on the eternal joyful Personality of Godhead. To live in ISKCON as an initiated student, one agrees to accept four rules: no meat-eating, no illicit sex, no intoxicants and no gambling. The disciples perform devotional service, duties and chanting in a life-routine characterized by simple living and high thinking.

Kṛṣṇa Consciousness is experienced as a process of self-purification. Its means and ends are an open secret, and there is no financial charge for learning Kṛṣṇa Consciousness or receiving initiation into the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa. The gist of devotional service to Kṛṣṇa is that one takes whatever capacity or talent he or she has and dovetails it with the transcendental interest of the Supreme Enjoyer, the Absolute Truth. The writer or poet writes articles and poems for Kṛṣṇa, and the Society publishes periodicals. The businessman does business in order to sell literature and establish many temples around the world. The householders raise children in the science of God, and husband and wife live in mutual cooperation for spiritual progress. And everyone in ISKCON goes on *Saṅkīrtan!* *Saṅkīrtan* means chanting the *Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra* in the city streets for the benefit of all citizens. A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swāmī has said that the *Saṅkīrtan* party is the heart and soul of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. Therefore, in each of the 25 ISKCON centers, *Saṅkīrtan* is carried on several times daily, and all other activity is subsidiary. Our spiritual master stresses this, for we are in the line of Lord Caitanya. Caitanya Mahāprabhu is revealed by Vedic scriptures to be Kṛṣṇa Himself, come in the mood of a pure devotee. Five thousand years ago Lord Caitanya understood from scripture that in this present age of *Kali* (quarrel and disturbance), when mental distraction is high and almost no one is serious about spiritual perfection, chanting alone is the most effective means of God realization. Following the *Saṅkīrtan*

process chalked out by Lord Caitanya, the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement of today takes parties of from five to 30 devotees, men wearing saffron robes and women wearing colorful saris. And they celebrate the Holy Name with dancing and melodious chanting.

The *Saṅkīrtan* singing is accompanied with *mṛdanga* drum and pairs of *kartals* (hand cymbals). The devotees experience that this joyous singing of the Names of God produces immediate feelings of ecstasy coming from the spiritual stratum. The effect is a clearing away of the dirt from the mind engrossed in the gloom of material existence. Under the instruction of the spiritual master, they gladly spread this chanting, and in reciprocation Sri Kṛṣṇa allows all to taste the nectar for which everyone is always anxious. Because the Personality of Godhead is Absolute, His Name is nondifferent from Himself. Therefore the Supreme Person, Kṛṣṇa, the Reservoir of Pleasure, dances on the tongue of the chanter of His Name; to chant and hear fixes the mind, in meditation, in direct contact with God. The mantra is not to be mistaken for an ordinary song or anything tinged with the mundane; it is a pure transcendental sound vibration of the Absolute and has been upheld as such since time immemorial by the great sages and Vedic scriptures. Lord Caitanya prays to the Supreme: "My dear Lord, You are so kind that You have invested all potency in Your Holy Name." This Absolute Presence of God in His Name holds true not only for the members of the *Saṅkīrtan* party, but for any living entity who hears the chanting; anyone will benefit if he simply likes the sound of the chanting, or if he appreciates the presence of the *Saṅkīrtan* party in any way. That is the Mercy of the Absolute. The Holy Name is compared to a fire; whether one is scientifically conversant with all the properties of fire or knows nothing about it, if one puts his hand in fire he will be burnt. Sincere chanting and hearing of the *Mahāmantra* will cleanse the mind and elevate one and all to the natural original position of spirit soul. Therefore there is no hesitancy on the devotees' part in going to the largest and most public gatherings of people and

broadcasting, wherever possible, the sound of the transcendental Names: Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare.

Chanting takes place regularly in the main streets of cities like New York, Los Angeles, Boston, San Francisco, Detroit, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Honolulu, London, Hamburg, Tokyo, etc., with new ISKCON centers being regularly established. The expansion of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness is realization of the prediction made by Lord Caitanya: "The chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa will be heard in every town and village of the world."

The Society is as famous for its Sunday feasts and festivals as for its chanting in the streets. Every Sunday, in each of the ISKCON centers, a grand feast of from 10 to 15 courses of Indian vegetarian food is prepared and distributed for guests. The feasts are arranged around festival days celebrating the Pastimes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa during His Appearance on the earth 5,000 years ago. Plays, puppet shows and chanting are regular items which invite guests to participate in the transcendental glorification of the Personality of Godhead. Kṛṣṇa Consciousness is not a dry philosophy. Residents of San Francisco appreciate the yearly *Ratha-yatra* Festival in which the large cart bearing the Jagannāth Deity is wheeled to the sea. During the Ratha-yatra celebration of 1969, more than 15,000 people followed the regal 8,000 pound cart, and thousands were fed full plates of *prasādam* at the seaside.

The important aim of the festivals, chanting and philosophizing is to engage people in the service of the Personality of Godhead and in feeling His soothing contact. All miseries are caused by forgetfulness of God, and ISKCON, by reviving the lost memory of the Supreme Lord in the minds of the people, is—according to *Bhagavad-gītā*—performing the greatest service and highest welfare work for suffering humanity. Moreover, it is performed in this sublime and easy way, by feasting, dancing, singing and philosophizing.

Sometimes in Lord Caitanya's time, the devotees were accused by the impersonalists of being mere sentimentalists because they were always singing and dancing. The actual fact is that Kṛṣṇa Consciousness is backed by a vast learned literature, the Vedic scriptures such as *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, *Vedānta-sūtra*, the *Upaniṣads*, *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, etc., so that one could read 24 hours a day without exhausting the Source. All of this Kṛṣṇa Consciousness information is understood by revelation. Simply by applying one's energy in a devotional service attitude, the knowledge becomes known to the devotee through the heart. Classes in the transcendental science of God consciousness or *bhakti-yoga* are held every morning and three nights a week at all ISKCON centers, and the public is freely invited to attend. The *Brahma Sampradāya* disciplic succession, in which A.C. Bhaktivedānta is coming, is particularly noted for being a learned line. There is plenty of philosophy and logic in stock. There are many different religious philosophies and transcendental teachings, but the Kṛṣṇa conscious students and ministers are unique in that they are convinced of the Personality of Godhead. Not just that they have heard "God is great," but they have heard from the spiritual master and continuously hearing from the scriptures just how great He is, how His energies are working and exactly how He is enjoying. There is no literature of theism as voluminous, exacting, consistent and clear as this Vedic literature of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. The conviction in service of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is due to direct reciprocation with Him. Simply by chanting or hearing the Pastimes of the Personality of Godhead, one is contacting the Absolute—and he can feel it. By engaging the senses, the will, words and energy, the devotees are receiving constant information from the Spiritual World. Kṛṣṇa Himself describes such devotees as the topmost yogis and mystics, so it is no wonder that they are conversant with the nature of God and the way back to Godhead.

ISKCON provides formal education in the highest science, or

what *Bhagavad-gītā* calls the “King of Knowledge.” Vedic sources, education can only be valid when there is knowledge or self-realization, and a man is said to have no vocations if he does not know who he is in terms of self-realization or God realization. Learning the texts requires living in accordance with the scriptural injunctions without the slightest deviation. The need for Kṛṣṇa conscious preachers is very great, and it is a full time vocation. The curriculum advances basically from student to minister; after studying and working in a temple for one year, the student may be awarded the title of *bhakti-śāstri*, or ordained minister, with further responsibilities and with advancement of service. He may finally take the renounced order, called *sannyāsa*, and receive the title *svāmī*.

As the philosophy of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness is non-sectarian, any man—Hindu or Christian—will advance in his faith by chanting the Holy Name of God and hearing the *Bhagavad-gītā*. Without knowledge, realization and loving service to the One Supreme God, there can be no religion. Let the inhabitants of this planet rejoice in the *Saṅkīrtan* movement and live to see the fulfillment of the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa carried to every town and village. Only in this way can real peace prevail in the world and mankind qualify to enter into the Kingdom of God.

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## ISKCON CENTERS

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*ISKCON has centers in the following cities:*

Berkeley	Boston	Boulder
Buffalo	Columbus	Detroit
Hamburg	Honolulu	Laguna Beach
London	Los Angeles	Montreal
New Vṛndāvana	New York City	Paris
Philadelphia	San Francisco	Santa Barbara
Seattle	St. Louis	Sydney
Tokyo	Toronto	Vancouver
Washington	Providence	

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