

# THE LIGHT

## SEEK THE PLEASURE OF ALLAH

by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad

“O my friends who have taken pledge and have become members of the Movement, may Allah grant you the power to do things which pleases Him. To-day you are small in number and are looked upon with contempt and humiliation. Presently you are passing through a trial. And in accordance with the established Divine practice every effort will be made to dissuade you. Distresses will be inflicted upon you and you will have to bear all these nasty and slanderous remarks. And everyone who will inflict upon you pain through his hand or tongue will deem it a service to the cause of Religion. You will also have to face heavenly tribulations so that you may be tested in every manner. So listen! Mere logic and reasoning will not make you triumphant or dominant. Do not resort to ridicule in retaliation to ridicule hurled at you or abuse the opponents because they abuse you. Because if you adopt these methods your hearts will become hard. You will be thus indulging in mere talks which Allah hates and looks at it with despise. So do not act in the manner that you incur two curses one of the people and the other of Allah.”

“Our Lord is truthful and faithful in fulfilling His promises. He shall bring about what He has promised. Although these are the last days of the world and many calamities are destined to befall, yet it is imperative that this earth witnesses all these events to come to pass as has been foretold.

Allah intends that all righteous souls whether living in Europe, Asia or in any part of the world, should be drawn towards His Unity and be brought together into the fold of One Religion. . . . So try to achieve this objective laying emphasis on meekness and supplication. You should seek divine help through the holy spirit with complete subservience to the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and purification of your inner selves. One cannot achieve real inner purification except through the Holy Spirit. In order to seek divine pleasure one should abstain from indulging in sensual pleasures. Follow the path which is the narrowest of all. Do not delve into worldly pleasures as these take one away from Allah. Earn Allah's pleasure by leading a life fraught with difficulties and hardships. Verily pains to seek pleases Allah than the pleasures which incur His displeasure.”

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## USA

### New York Ahmadiyya Convention

The Annual Convention of the North American Jama'ats of Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement was held on 1st and 2nd September, 1990 in Long Island, New York. The New York Jama'at was the host and made all arrangements with regard to the organization of the convention and looking after the delegates. Invitations had also been extended to Jama'ats in other countries. The Guyana Jama'at sent a strong contingent to the Convention. Maulana Mustafa Kamal Hydell, Imam of Ahmadiyya Anjuman Trinidad also participated in the convention. Among the prominent speakers who delivered speeches and talks at the convention were: Brother Abdur Rashid Khan, Mr. Zafar Abdullah, Mr. Baj Khan, Maulana Mustafa Kamal Hydell (Trinidad), Brother M. Ishak, Dr. Nouman Elahi Malik, Mr. H. Rahman, Mr. Imtiaz Ishak, Dr. M. Ahmad, Brother Wazir Mohammad and his wife Safoura Mohammad from Toronto.

Sister Samina Sahu Khan from Canada made an appeal for funds for the translation of the Holy Quran into various languages and other publications. The appeal produced donations of cash, jewellery and pledges of approximately US Dollars 28,000 for publications and US Dollars 12,000 for translations. Earlier on the first day, an appeal by Brother Baj Khan for donations for a building to house an Ahmadiyya Centre, a collection of US Dollars 16,000 was made.

– Newsletter, Ahmadiyya Anjuman, USA.

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## NEWS FROM PAKISTAN AND ABROAD

### Hazrat Ameer Dr. Saeed Ahmad Khan Sahib

By the grace of Allah Hazrat Ameer Dr. Saeed Ahmad Khan Sahib is attending to the work of the Anjuman as usual. Members are requested to continue their prayers for his health and long life.

### MAULANA HAFIZ SHER MUHAMMAD SAHIB PASSED AWAY

It is with profound grief and deep sorrow that we record death of our veteran scholar and a distinguished missionary Maulana Hafiz Sher Muhammad on 12th October, 1990 at his native place Khushab. His body was brought to Lahore by road. Janaza prayers led by Hazrat Ameer Dr. Saeed Ahmad Khan Sahib were offered at the Jami'ah Darus Salaam. The body was laid to eternal rest in the Ahmadiyya Cemetery, Darus Salaam. Hazrat Ameer Dr. Saeed Ahmad Khan Sahib paid glowing tributes to late Hafiz Sahib in a brief and moving address at the graveyard and offered prayers for the deceased. May Allah shower His choicest blessings on the departed soul and grant him eternal peace.

### An Apology to our Readers

We owe an apology to our readers for delayed publication of the *Light*. Circumstances beyond our control have compelled us to reduce its pages and restrict nature of its articles. We hope when circumstances are favourable we will be able to bring out *Light* in its usual volume and style.

### GUYANA

According to reports sent by Moulvi Mohammad Rasheed, chief missionary of Ahmadiyya Anjuman Guyana, a very successful youth seminar was held from 11th to 18th August, 1990 at the central Jami'ah of Guyana Anjuman in Georgetown. More than forty youth representatives from different parts of Guyana participated in various sessions of the Seminar. It was opened by Brother Alim Shah, president of Ahmadiyya Anjuman Guyana. Besides Imam Mohammad Rasheed, Mrs. Salima Khan, Brother Abdul Muktedir and Moulvi Azad Khan gave illuminating talks.

A meeting was also organised at the Jami'ah Ahmadiyya in Berbice in which Imam Moulvi Nadir Ali, Moulvi Azad Khan and Imam Mohammad Rasheed spoke on various aspects of the Ahmadiyya Movement.

### HOLLAND

#### Amsterdam

Amsterdam Jama'at is planning for complete renovation and reconstruction of their Ahmadiyya centre. An amount of US Dollars 180,000 approximately will be spent for the project. Mr. Lateef Ata'ullah, president of the Amsterdam Jama'at informs us that two-third of the amount is expected from the municipal corporation.

#### Utrecht

The Ahmadiyya Anjuman Utrecht is also undertaking a comprehensive plan to reconstruct its existing building which was a Jewish synagogue purchased in 1985. In this connection foundation laying ceremony was held on 8th August, 1990. Mr. Djahour Djahangeer, president of the Utrecht Jama'at informs us that construction is in progress for some months now.

— A.S. Abdul Santoe, Rotterdam

### INDIA

We are extremely sorry to inform our readers that youngest son of our esteemed brother Muhammad Amin Ahmad died in Ichaklkaranji. May Allah bless the departed soul and grant strength to the members of the bereaved family to bear this sudden bereavement.

## THE UNIFICATION OF MANKIND

by Kalamazad Muhammad, Trinidad.

After the unity and universality of God, Islam inculcates the truism of the unity of mankind under the sovereignty of God for without acceptance of this principle there can be no practical unification of mankind.

The Holy Quran says: "All people are one single nation" (2:213).

"O people surely We have created you of a male and a female and made you tribes and families that you may distinguish one another; but the most honourable among you are surely the most God-fearing of you; surely God is Knowing, Aware" (49:13).

The Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, also exhorts us: "Listen: Verily your Lord is one. Listen: Verily your father is one; O people of God, become brethren".

And Maulana Sadr-ud-Din in his book. "Islam is Modern", remarks:

"When we come to realise that every nation is the creation of the self-same God, and every nation is being looked after by the self-same God, we will then look upon all mankind as God's big family. There have, however, arisen in God's family mistaken views and prejudices, which keep its members apart. Their prejudices must be eliminated in order to bring peace and happiness to this family. Accordingly, the Holy Quran describes and discusses prejudices born of fanatical and religious views, prejudices that owe their origin to notions of racial superiority, and prejudices for which differences of colour and language are responsible." (p. 15).

But the Holy Quran does not limit itself only to a theoretical description and discussion of the problem, but goes way beyond that. And so every institution in Islam including the practical and fundamental pillars of the religion — of Prayer, Charity, Fasting and Pilgrimage — is geared towards bringing into realization the fact that mankind is a single species.

### Significance of Prayer

We shall look at prayer first. In Islam prayer is not only for personal purification; nor is it for self-development alone; nor is it only for the realization of the Divine within ourselves. It is also in the words of Maulana Muhammad Ali, "the means of levelling all differences of rank, colour and nationality, and the means of bringing about a cohesion and unity among men which is the necessary basis of a living civilization."

"Once within the doors of the Mosque, every Muslim finds himself in an atmosphere of equality and love. Before their Maker they all stand shoulder to shoulder, the king along with his poorest subject, the rich arrayed in gorgeous robes with the beggar clad in rags, the white man with the black. Nay, the king or rich man standing in a back row, will have to lay his head, prostrating himself before God, at the feet of a slave or a beggar in the front. There can be no more levelling influence in the world. Differences of rank, wealth and colour vanish within the equality and love, totally differing from the outside world, prevails within the holy precincts" (pp. 292-298).

And every worshipper is fully conscious of the warning given in the Holy Quran:

"So woe to the praying ones, who are unmindful of their prayer, who do good to be seen, and refrain from acts of kindness."

### Institution of Charity

It brings us to another institution in Islam for achieving the unity of mankind, that of Charity, both voluntary and compulsory, for without "acts of kindness" or "good deeds" our faith will not be constantly watered and will so wither and die.

The Holy Quran repeatedly enjoins upon us that we should pay the compulsory charity ("Keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate) in addition to other voluntary acts of goodness which encompass all human activity and which include meeting a brother with a smile. The Holy Quran states in answer to those who believe that only a particular group will

enter paradise to the exclusion of all others:

“Nay, whoever submits himself entirely to Allah and he is a doer of good to others, he has his reward from his Lord, and there is no fear for such nor shall they grieve” (2:112).

And as regards the universal nature of charity the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, is reported to have said: “On every bone of the fingers charity is incumbent every day: one who assists a man in riding his beast or in lifting his provisions to the back of the animal, this is charity; and a good word and every step which one takes in walking over to prayer is charity; and showing the way (to another) is charity” (*Bukhari*, 56:72).

“Every good deed is charity, and it is a good deed that thou meet thy brother with a cheerful countenance and that thou pour water from thy bucket into the vessel of thy brother” (*Mishkat* 6:6).

And thus we are urged to spend out of what good God has entrusted to us in the service of all mankind and not only for our own benefit nor for the benefit of our families and members of our own race, nation or religion; for the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, has enlightened us thus: “Mankind is a fold every member of which shall be a keeper or shepherd unto every other, and be accountable for the welfare of the entire fold”.

“O Lord: Lord of my life and of everything in the Universe, I affirm that all human beings are brothers unto one another”.

But this responsibility comprises more than the human race for the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, continues: “All creatures of God form the family of God, and he is the best loved of God who loveth best His creatures”.

“Respect the ways of God, and be affectionate to the family of God”.

It must be pointed out here that in order to receive fully the rewards of our charity, our spending must be only for the sake of God and must be untainted by selfish desires and calculating ambitions.

The Holy Quran gives us a description of the truly selfless servants of God:

“And they give food out of love for Him, to the

poor and the orphan and the captive.

We feed you (they say) for Allah’s pleasure only – We desire from you neither reward nor thanks”. (76:9).

Neither should we give it with any feeling of self-righteousness, pious smugness, vanity or conceit. Rather the Holy Quran tells us: “And those who give what they give while their hearts are full of fear that to their Lord they must return” (23:60).

Moreover, the Arabic word used for “giving” in regard to charity really means “presenting” thus safeguarding the dignity of the one who receives the gift.

Further more, the Holy Quran gives us a challenge in the following words:

“You cannot attain to righteousness unless you spend out of what you love . . . . .” and holds out as an ideal those who “prefer others before themselves though poverty may afflict them” (3:91).

#### **Fasting as a unifying force**

Now we come to the third practical pillar of Islam – FASTING.

For, in fasting we experience not only the levelling of outer social divisions, but also the inner realization of the oneness of mankind. When we fast we are forced to undergo the very feelings of hunger, thirst and deprivation of our fellow human beings from among the poor and the downtrodden and so we advance from a mere sympathetic feeling for them to a true sympathetic consciousness of their lot and this impels us to selfless service to all mankind.

With reference to the power of fasting as a unifying social force, Maulana Muhammad Ali in his *Religion of Islam* says:

“In addition to its spiritual and moral values, fasting as prescribed in the Holy Quran has also a social value, more effective than that which is realized through prayer. Rich and poor, great and small, residents of the same vicinity are brought together five times daily in the mosque on terms of perfect equality and thus healthy social relations are established through prayer. But the commencement of the month of Ramazan is a signal for a mass movement towards equality which is not limited to one vicinity or even one country but affects the whole Muslim World. The rich and the poor may stand shoulder to

shoulder in one row in the mosque, but in their homes they live in different environments. The rich sit down on tables laden with dainties and with these they load their stomachs four, even six times daily; while the poor cannot find sufficient food with which to satisfy their hunger even twice a day . . . A great social barrier thus exists between the two classes in their homes, and this barrier is removed only when the rich are made to feel the pangs of hunger like their poorer brethren and go without food throughout the day, and this experience has to be gone through, not only for a day or two, but for a whole month" (pp. 398-399).

But perhaps the greatest demonstration of the unity of mankind comes during the annual Pilgrimage to Makkah. There, people of every race, every colour, every tongue, every nationality come together; young and old, male and female, all dressed alike in a spontaneous spiritual outpouring of surrender to one God and love for mankind. Every feeling of bitterness or rancour is rooted out of the heart and every prejudice is banished.

Man comes face to face with his Maker: "Labbaik Allahumma Labbaik" *Here we are, O Allah: here we are in Thy presence*, and is made fully conscious of the fact that mankind is a single nation and God is Lord of all. The pilgrim experiences here an

earthly foreshadowing of what the righteous will taste in paradise on the Day of Resurrection:

"And We shall root out whatever of rancour is in their breasts — as brethren, on raised couches, face to face". (15:47).

As Maulana Muhammad Ali writes:

"It is Hajj (Pilgrimage) alone that brings into the domain of practicality what would otherwise seem impossible, namely that all people, to whatever class or country they belong, should speak one language and wear one dress. Thus is every Muslim made to pass once in his life through that narrow fate of equality which leads to broad brotherhood. All men are equal in birth and death; they come into life and pass out of it the same way, but Hajj (Pilgrimage) is the only occasion on which they are taught how to live alike, how to act alike and how to feel alike" (*Religion of Islam*, p. 506).

Through such institutions, Islam aims at bringing into practicality the elusive theoretical goal of the unity of the human race, despite the various discords, vested interests, pride and prejudice, false stereotype and competing ideologies that have always bedevilled the world.

## BOOK REVIEW

**THE TRUTH — A Running Commentary on the Holy Quran** by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, pp. 161, published for free distribution by Iftikhar Ahmad, 124 Babar Block, New Garden Town, Lahore. 1988.

There are many translations of the Holy Quran, of varying degrees of accuracy and excellence, by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, but the one by Maulana Muhammad Ali (Lahore, first edition 1918, sixth revised edition 1973) excels all others. Maulana Muhammad Ali has succeeded more than any other translator in conveying accurately and fully the meaning and sense of the Arabic Quran in English. His annotations are a proof of his vast knowledge, profound understanding, deep religious insight and mastery in the fields of scriptural exegesis and Comparative Religion. They show him as a truly great scholar, who combines genuine spiri-

tuality with scholarly conscience. The language of his translation is correct and simple and he makes no pretensions to distinction of style or harmony of expression. He has not even attempted to reproduce in the English translation the various patterns of rhythm found in the Arabic original.

Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation (Lahore, first edition 1934), on the other hand, is notable for the beauty of its language and the graceful, rhythmic flow of its lines. It is in free verse.

The Holy Quran is not only a book of Divine Guidance, it is also a masterpiece of Arabic literature. And no great work of literature can be translated into any other language, least of all the Word of God. This is what Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall writes in the foreword to his own famous translation, the

*Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (London, first edition 1930; New York, Mentor Books, first printing 1953): "The Koran cannot be translated. This is the belief of old-fashioned Sheykh's and the view of the present writer. The book is here rendered almost literally and every effort has been made to choose befitting language. But the result is not the Glorious Koran, that inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy."

What Maulana Muhammad Ali never even attempted; what Marmaduke Pickthall thought was impossible; Allama Yusuf Ali has at least made the effort to achieve. He has tried his best to capture in his translation something of that symphony, beauty and grandeur of style: "The rhythm; music, and exalted tone of the original should be reflected in the English Interpretation. It may be but a faint reflection, but such beauty and power as my pen can command shall be brought to its service. I want to make English into an Islamic language; if such a person as I can do it." And a little later he writes: "Perhaps the attempt to catch something of that symphony in another language is impossible. Greatly daring I have made that attempt. We do not blame an artist who tries to catch in his picture something of the glorious light of a spring landscape."

Another admirable feature of Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation is the running commentary which accompanies it — also in free verse. The commentary begins as an introduction to the Holy Quran by reflecting on the creation of the universe and men.

Glory to God Most High, full of Grace and Mercy;  
He created all, including Man.  
To man He gave a special place in His Creation.  
He honoured man to be His Agent.  
And to that end, endued him with understanding,  
Purified his affections and gave him spiritual insight;  
So that man should understand Nature,  
Understand himself,  
And know God through His wondrous Signs,  
And glorify Him in Truth, reverence, and unity.

The learned Commentator then goes on to talk of God sending His prophets or messengers to the people of different nations and different times to guide mankind to the truth.

And so this light of eternal Unity  
Has shone in all ages and among all nations,  
Through chosen Apostles of God, who came  
As men to dwell among men,  
To share their joys and sorrows,

To suffer for them and with them,—  
Aye, and to suffer more than falls  
To ordinary mortal lot,—  
That so their message and their life  
Might fulfil the eternal  
And unchanging purpose of the Most High,—  
To lead man to his noblest destiny.

Then, when the time was ripe, God sent the Last Prophet as His messenger, not to one nation or for a limited period of time, but to all mankind and for all times to come. Through the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him!) God's revealed religion was brought to completion and perfection. The Running Commentary relates in twenty-five moving stanzas the life of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him!).

At length came the time when the voice of unity  
Should speak and declare to the People,  
Without the need of Priests or Priestcraft,  
Without miracles save those that happen  
Now and always in the spiritual world,  
Without mystery, save those mysteries  
Which unfold themselves in the growing  
Inner experience of man and His vision of God,—  
To declare with unfaltering voice  
The unity of God, the Brotherhood of Man,  
And Grace and Mercy, Bounty and Love,  
Poured out in unstinted measure for ever and ever.

The Commentary in a couple of stanzas introduces the Holy Quran, which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and then, from that point onward, accompanies the translation of the Quran at regular intervals from the first chapter to the last. Where the chapter is short Allama Yusuf Ali devotes one or two stanzas of the Running Commentary to prepare the reader for the text and to paraphrase its contents. Where the chapter is long he introduces the subject matter and main ideas in short, appropriate stanzas from time to time, each indicating the particular verses to which it refers. Thus the Running Commentary ('The Truth') is both an introductory to the Holy Quran and a brilliant summary of its contents.

The Quran opens with the most beautiful of all prayers, which is also the Essence of the Book. The Commentary introduces it in these words:

Prayer is the heart of Religion and faith,  
But how shall we pray? What words shall convey  
The yearnings of our miserable ignorant hearts  
To the Knower of all? Is it worthy of Him  
Or of our spiritual nature to ask

For vanities, or even for such physical needs  
 As our daily bread? The Inspired One  
 Taught us a Prayer that sums up our faith,  
 Our hope, and our aspirations in things that  
 matter.  
 We think in devotion of God's name and His  
 nature;  
 We praise Him for His creation and His cherishing  
 care,  
 We call to mind the Realities, seen and unseen;  
 We offer Him worship and ask for His guidance:  
 And we know the straight from the crooked  
 path  
 By the light of His grace that illumines the right-  
 eous.

The main theme of the Quran is the unity and  
 mercy of God: His loving care and guidance to  
 mankind. The Quran gives the most perfect concep-  
 tion of the unity of the Godhead — often professed,  
 but frequently mixed up in the popular mind with  
 debasing superstitions. Allama Yusuf Ali paraphrases  
*Sura Ikhlas* (112) as follows in his Running Commen-  
 tary:

Keep Faith all pure and undefiled.  
 There is God, the One and Only;  
 Eternal, Free of all needs; on Whom  
 Depend, to Whom go back, all things;  
 He hath no son nor father nor partner.  
 There is no person like unto Him.

God is described in the Quran as the Light which  
 shines in the universe and in the hearts of men.

God is the light of the heavens and the earth.  
 High above all over petty evanescent lives,  
 He illumines our souls with means that reach  
 Our inmost being. Universal is  
 His light, so pure and so intense  
 That grosser beings need a veil  
 To take His rays: His elect are e'er  
 Absorbed in prayer and praise and deeds  
 Of love, unlike the children of Darkness,  
 Struggling in Depths profound of vanities  
 False. All Nature sings to the glory  
 Of God, and men of fraud and hypocrisy  
 Are but rebels in the Kingdom of God.

The Quran refers to the evidence of Time through  
 the Ages and reveals the secret of the rise and fall of  
 nations and true success and failure of individuals.  
 All history shows that Evil comes to an evil end.  
 But time is always in favour of those who have Faith,  
 live clean and pure lives, and know how to wait in  
 patience and constancy.

Waste not, nor misuse, your life, Time  
 Through the Ages bears witness that nothing  
 remains  
 But Faith and Good Deeds, and the teaching of  
 Truth  
 And the teaching of Patience and Constancy.  
 But for these, Man against Time is in loss!

Islam is the religion of unity — unity of God,  
 unity of mankind, unity of religion, unity of the  
 prophets of all nations. It preaches the Fatherhood of  
 God and the Brotherhood of Man. The magnificent  
 Running Commentary on the Holy Quran comes to  
 a close with the following stanzas:

What can we do to make God's Light  
 Shine forth through the darkness around us?  
 We must first let it shine in our own true Selves!  
 With that Light in the niche of our inmost hearts  
 We can walk with steps both firm and sure:  
 We can humbly visit the comfortless  
 And guide their steps. Not we, but the Light  
 Will guide! But Oh! the joy of being found  
 Worthy to bear the Torch, and to say  
 To our brethren: "I too was in Darkness,  
 Comfortless, and behold, I have found  
 Comfort and Joy in the Grace Divine!"

Thus should we pay the dues of Brotherhood,—  
 By walking humbly, side by side,  
 In the ways of the Lord,  
 With mutual aid and comfort,  
 And heartfelt prayer,  
 Backed by action,  
 That God's good Purpose  
 May be accomplished  
 In us all together!

Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali's Running Commen-  
 tary on the Holy Quran is a beautiful poem of three  
 hundred stanzas. The thought of the poem is of all  
 thoughts the greatest — embracing, as it does, God,  
 Creation, Man: God's Vicegerent, Purpose of Man's  
 Creation, God's guidance to man, love and mercy,  
 good and evil, the Destiny of mankind, Universal  
 Brotherhood of Man. Its diction and style are as  
 exalted and grand as its thought is great and sublime.  
 Mr. Iftikhar Ahmad has rendered a great service  
 by publishing Allama Yusuf Ali's Running Commen-  
 tary in a separate volume, aptly entitled *The Truth*.  
 Allama Yusuf Ali himself wrote, "It is possible to  
 read this running, rhythmic Commentary by itself  
 to get a general bird's-eye view of the contents of the  
 Holy Book before you proceed to the study of the  
 Book itself."



## AN INTRODUCTION TO KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS

*THE KING OF KNOWLEDGE* (Raja Vidya) by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, founder of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, pages 115; published by the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 3764 Watsaka Avenue, Los Angeles, California, 90034. Fourth Printing, 1986. Price not given.

The International Society of Krishna Consciousness (popularly known as Hari Krishna) is a world-wide community of Vaishnava devotees dedicated to the principles of *bhakti-yoga* (path of union with God through loving devotion.) The members of this society regard Krishna as the Supreme God and offer their loving devotion to him, mainly through *Sankirtana Yajna* (dancing and chanting Hari Krishna, Hari Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hari Hari, Hari Rama, Hari Rama, Rama Rama, Hari Hari.)

Historians and scholars of Indian religions and philosophy, however, tell us that Sri Krishna (c. 7th century B.C.) never claimed to be God; he was a divinely inspired preacher of a monotheistic faith, called Bhagavata Dharma. The name which Sri Krishna gave to the one and only God, the Creator and Lord of the universe, was Bhagavan (the Exalted One.) The path of salvation or liberation (*mukti*) that he taught was one of faith in God and righteous way of life: "Those who ever follow my doctrine and who have faith, and have good will, find through pure work their freedom" (Bhagavad Gita 3:31)

The established religion of those times was Brahminism, an earlier form of Hinduism — a religion of many elaborate sacrifices, meticulously and mechanically performed by Brahmin priests to obtain favours and rewards from the nature-gods (*devas*). In Brahminism, as the very name suggests, the Brahmin priests had the dominant position, and they had brought into existence an unjust caste system and declare the *Vedas* (four collections of hymns to the personified and deified powers of nature) to be divine books. The knowledge of the sacrifices was preserved in another series of scriptures, the *Brahmanas*, to which only the Brahmin priests had access.

Sri Krishna condemned Brahminism and rejected

the divine authority of the Vedas, declaring: "The Vedas are of as little use to the seer of the Supreme as is a small tank in a place covered all over with water" (B.G. 2:46). He strongly disapproved of the caste system and would have nothing to do with the lifeless and soul-destroying rituals and sacrifices of the Brahmins. He said that what pleased God was not offerings and sacrifices, but truth and moral integrity and selfless service to fellow human beings. The Brahmins performed sacrifices by lighting a fire at the altar and throwing into it meat of animals, butter, milk, grain cooked in milk and intoxicating drinks as offerings to please the *devas* (the so-called nature-gods). But the sacrifice that Krishna approved of was the sacrifice of one's selfish desires, nay the sacrifice of one's whole self in the fire of God:

"Who in all his work sees God, he in truth goes unto God: God is his worship, God is his offering, offered by God in the fire of God. There are yogis whose sacrifice is an offering to the gods; but others, who are my followers, offer as a sacrifice their own self in the fire of God" (B.G. 4:24-25.)

The religion of Sri Krishna may be described as ethical monotheism. He laid the greatest stress on faith in and love of the one and only God (Bhagavan) and on surrender of one's will to the will of God: "Those whose minds are ever serene win the victory of life on this earth. God is pure and ever one, and ever one they are in God" (B.G. 5:19)

"When a man surrenders all desires that come to the heart and by the grace of God finds the joy of God, then his soul has indeed found peace" (B.G. 2:55.)

Bhagavata Dharma was essentially a moral religion and Sri Krishna was never tired of exhorting his followers to be sincere and kind and to do good deeds:

"Freedom from fear, purity of heart, constancy in sacred learning and contemplation, generosity, self-harmony...righteousness; non-violence, truth, freedom from anger, serenity, aversion to fault-finding, sympathy for all, peace from greedy crav-

ings, gentleness, modesty, steadiness; energy, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, a good will, freedom from pride — these are the treasures of the man who is born for heaven” (B.G. 16:1-3.)

Sri Krishna enjoined upon his followers the doing of good for its own sake — as worship of God — and not for the sake of reward:

“Set thy heart upon thy work, but never on its reward. Work not for a reward; but never cease to do thy work” (B.G. 2:47.)

“A man attains perfection when his work is worship of God, from whom all things come and who is in all” (B.G. 18:46.)

“Offer all thy works to God, throw off selfish bonds, and do thy work. No sin can then stain thee, even as waters do not stain the leaf of the lotus” (B.G. 5:10.)

The purity and nobility of the Bhagavata religion could not be maintained for long. As in the case of many other divinely-inspired prophets and teachers of ethical monotheism (e.g., Jesus and the Buddha), Krishna also was raised to the divine pedestal after his death by his ignorant and credulous followers. Instead of worshipping the God of Krishna, some of his followers began worshipping Krishna himself. In the course of years the Bhagavata Dharma was absorbed into Hinduism and Krishna was declared to be one of the incarnations of Vishnu, the second person of the Hindu Divine Trinity. He became the Supreme God of the Vaishnava sect. His beautiful and sublime scripture, the Bhagavad Gita, was substantially altered to bring it in line with the Hindu religious outlook and to make Krishna appear not as a prophet of God but as God Himself, the incarnation of Vishnu. The revelations and words of God to Krishna were made to appear as if they were the words of Krishna himself. And finally this revised and much altered Bhagavad Gita was incorporated into the great Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*. This is what Professor M. Hiriyanna has written in his *Essentials of Indian Philosophy*:

“The monotheistic creed came, in the course of time, to be combined with the Vedic cult of Vishnu-Narayana; and it was this combination that chiefly contributed to make the God of Vaisnavism even more personal than that of Saivism. Somewhat later Sri Krishna, the prophet of Bhagavata religion, was deified and identified with Vishnu-Narayana as an incarnation of him” (p. 35.)

Not only was Krishna made the incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu, but what is even more surprising,

he was also identified with the boy-god of a nomadic tribe of cowherds, whose name perhaps was also Krishna, and many tales were told of his pranks and love affairs with the *gopis* (milkmaids); his favourite mistress of his youthful years was Radha.

The International Society of Krishna Consciousness is a modern version of the Vaishnava sect. The chief characteristic of Vaishnavism is the intense devotion (*bhakti*) to the personal god Vishnu, who is accepted not only as the preserver (as in classical Hinduism), but also as the creator and destroyer of the universe. As such Vaishnavism is a form of monotheism, for it sets aside the original triune equality of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva in favour of the god Vishnu, often called Hari. His two manifestations in human form are said to be Krishna and Rama.

Vaishnavism has produced many great philosophers and saints. The greatest Vaishnava philosopher was Ramanuja (11th century C.E.), who was an exponent of the doctrine of *Visisthadvaita* (Modified Monism) as opposed to the *Advaita* doctrine (Absolute Monism) of Sankara (8th century C.E.). While Sankara's God is impersonal and without attributes (*nir-guna*), Ramanuja believed in a personal God having attributes (*sa-guna*). While Sankara was of the view that in salvation (*moksha*), the soul is merged with God and loses its identity, Ramanuja believed that even in union with God the soul retains its personal identity and self-consciousness.

The greatest Vaishnava poet was Jayadeva (12th century C.E.), who wrote an exquisite poem on the love of Krishna and Radha, called *Gita Govinda*. This great poem (like the song of Solomon in the Bible) is regarded as an allegoric representation of the human soul alternately attracted by earthly and heavenly beauty. Other well-known Vaishnava poet-mystics are Mira-bai, Tulsi Das and Tukaram.

The Vaishnava sect also has its mystic saints, of whom Chaitanya is perhaps the most famous. Chaitanya was born in Bengal in the year 1485. He had his first religious experience while he was reading about Krishna in the *Bhagavata Purana* (Srimad Bhagvatam). After that, for hours together he would meditate on Krishna and, impelled by a mighty enthusiasm, preached of the intense joy he found in contemplation of and loving devotion to Krishna. It is a curious fact that whilst Chaitanya himself was an ardent worshipper of Krishna, he should now be regarded as an incarnation of that deity (just as many centuries earlier, Krishna too was made the incar-

nation of God, although he had claimed only to be a human prophet and true worshipper of God.)

The Chaitanya section of Vaishnavism lays great stress on *bhakti*, or loving devotion and faith. They believe in Krishna as the Supreme God. There are five degrees of *bhakti*: (1) *Santa* – Calm, unimpassioned contemplation of Krishna; (2) *Dasya* – service of Krishna as of the master by his slave; (3) *Sakya*, or friendship; when he attains to this height, the devotee no longer regards Krishna as his master, but as his personal friend; (4) *Batsalya*, or filial affection – at this stage the devotee feels for Krishna the kind of affection which a son has for his father; (5) *Madhurya*, or sweetness – loving Krishna as the milkmaids of Vrindavana loved him, the highest type of all being that which Radha had for Krishna. Among the most important duties, as taught by the Chaitanya sect, are (a) *Guru padasraya*, or taking refuge under a guru, (b) *Nama Kirtana*, i.e. the repetition of the name of the deity, the common formula being: “Hari Krishna, Hari Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hari Hari, Hari Rama, Hari Rama, Rama Rama, Hari Hari,” (c) *Sankirtana*: this is a public act, in which a number join in joyfully dancing and singing the praises of Krishna.

Krishna Consciousness is a form of Chaitanya's Vaishnavism adapted to the needs of the people in the West. Many men and women in Western countries are dissatisfied with the dogmatic and ritual-bound religious systems of the Christian churches. On the other hand, the materialistic and mechanical existence of the modern West had left them without any peace of mind. Taking advantage of this situation many God-men, Maharishis, Swamis and Gurus from India have created cults without theology or dogmas and with modes of worship or meditation calculated to bring immediate peace and ecstasy to the human heart. They have established centres all over Europe and America and attracted thousands of followers and devotees to their cults. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi invented a technique of yoga, called “transcendental meditation”, designed to lead the yogi to “instant nirvana”, a sort of short-cut to illumination and ecstasy. Bhagavan Rajneesh recommends destruction of all inhibitions as the way to bliss and “cosmic consciousness.” “Let down your defences and give yourself to the Guru,” he exhorts. “Look at yourself after removing all your clothes; and look at yourself after removing all your doctrines.” Bala Satguru Maharaja, regarded as God's incarnation by his followers, claims to be “the dispeller of all darkness and revealer of light.” They all emphasize the need of a Guru to help the devotees on the path to knowledge

and salvation. “Give your Guru the honour due to God,” says Swami Prabhupada, the Guru of Krishna Consciousness.

The International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), commonly called “Hari Krishna,” was founded by a Bengali, named Abhay Charan De. At the behest of his Guru, De gave up his business and became a *Sanyasi*. Three years later he was nominated to spread Krishna Consciousness in foreign lands and eventually he became the Guru of the sect. His title is Bhaktivedanta (devotee of the Vedic knowledge) Swami (Lord) Prabhupada (footstool of the Lord). He is regarded by his followers as the present-day incarnation of Krishna. He and his followers give the supreme importance to books which the orthodox Hindus regard as *Smriti* (non-revealed), particularly to the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Bhagavata Purana*. They totally ignore the revealed scriptures of the Hindus (the *Shruti*).

Krishna Consciousness is somewhat different from the other modern cults from India. It has not discarded the traditional Hindu Vaishnava theology and modes of worship. The followers of this cults offer their worship before the idols of Krishna and his favourite mistress Radha by burning incense and waving salvers full of oil lamps, while all the time the congregation repeats the chant (*Sankirtana*) louder and in quickening tempo. They shuffle their feet as in rock-'n'-roll dance, clap their hands to beat time, raise aloft their arms and leap into the air. The singing and dancing become frenzied and come to a climax. It ends with a crescendo of *Jais* to gods of the Hindu pantheon; their loudest *Jai* is reserved for Swami Prabhupada. The devotees go down on their knees, pressing their foreheads to the ground, and *Ganga-jal* (Ganges water) is sprinkled on them. When they rise, it is apparent that though they are exhausted, they are at peace with themselves. Swami Prabhupada writes in his book the *King of Knowledge*:

“We can easily see that activities in Krishna Consciousness are joyfully done. There is chanting and dancing, eating *prasadam* (food that has been offered to Krishna) and discussing *Bhagavad-gita*. These are the main processes.” (p.7).

Members of the sect (including Europeans and Americans) dress in saffron *Kurtas* and *dhotis*, Indian style, and men shave their heads except for the raft of the *chutia*. Men and women alike have the peculiar sect mark on their foreheads. They are a familiar sight in the big cities of England and America, where they go into crowded streets, beating

drums and cymbals and chanting "Hari Krishna, Hari Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hari Hari, Hari Rama, Hari Ramà, Rama Rama, Hari Hari." The Society has a large following and well over one hundred *asramas*, schools, temples, institutions and farm communities all over the world.

*The King of Knowledge* by Swami Prabhupada, the founder of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, is about the supreme knowledge which Krishna is said to have imparted to his favourite disciple, Arjuna, on the battlefield of Krukshetra, while the armies of the Kauravas and the Pandavas stood facing each other, all ready to start the Great War. Krishna is described as the Supreme God — as Bhagavan, the "possessor of all opulences" — "the totality of knowledge, wealth, power, beauty, fame and renunciation." Swami Prabhupada writes: "As far as His opulence is concerned, He married 16, 108 wives. Every wife had her own separate palace, and Krishna expanded himself 18, 108 times in order to enjoy them all. This may seem difficult to believe but it is stated in *Srimad Bhagavatam*, and the great sages of India recognise this as scripture and recognise Krishna as God." (p. 3).

Krishna chose Arjuna for the purpose of revealing the "King of all Knowledge" because Arjuna was not envious of Krishna. He had full faith and trust in him and had surrendered himself to him completely and wholeheartedly. Swami Prabhupada informs us that Arjuna was not the first to receive this sovereign knowledge. 400 million years ago, Krishna proclaimed it to the Sun-god Vivasvan ("Of all the beings on the sun," we are told, "the principal personality is a god by the name of Vivasvan") and Vivasvan taught it to his son Manu, the father of mankind, and Manu in turn passed it on to Ikshvaku, and so on (B.G. 4:1-2). But by the time Arjuna was born in this world (5000 years ago, according to Swami Prabhupada), this knowledge had been completely forgotten, and so Krishna revived it and revealed it anew to Arjuna.

This "King of Knowledge", according to Swami Prabhupada, is the perfect and pure knowledge of God and of the truth that man is part and parcel of God, knowing which one is freed from the cycle of births and deaths (*samsara*) and finds salvation. It is, according to Swami Prabhupada, "Krishna Consciousness," because Krishna is God. He asserts that whatever we see in the universe was created by

Krishna. He is everywhere in the creation and the material nature is working under his direction. "The Lord," he affirms, "is all-pervading all over the universe and is within the soul, the heart, water, air — everywhere. Thus if we make an image of God in anything — clay, stone, wood, or whatever — it should not be considered to be just a doll. That also is God." (p. 28). And he assures us in all seriousness: "If we have sufficient devotion, the image will also speak to us." He relates many miracles that Krishna is supposed to have performed (as reported in the *Puranas*) and of how he made himself visible to those who believed in him. "The great souls," he avers, "know without a doubt that Krishna is the supreme personality of Godhead and that He is the origin of all emanations." (p. 35).

This King of all Knowledge (Krishna Consciousness) is not easy to gain and only one in a million attain to it. In the words of Swami Prabhupada, "So understanding Krishna is not such an easy job. Thus in this age of Kali, an age characterized by ignorance and chaos, liberation is out of reach of practically everyone. One has to go through the whole ordeal of becoming civilized, then religious, and then one has to perform charities and sacrifices and come to the platform of knowledge, and then to the stage of liberation, and finally, after liberation, to the understanding of what Krishna is." (pp. 10-11)

Therefore, says Swami Prabhupada, realizing that in this evil age it was almost impossible for a man to gain salvation and supreme knowledge of God, Krishna-God appeared in this world as Chaitanya, about 500 years ago, and revealed an easy and quick way to gain this Sovereign Knowledge and salvation, and this easy and quick way is chanting "Hari Krishna, Hari Rama" (*San-Kirtana*): "This kind of knowledge may not seem to be easily attainable, but it is made very easy by the mercy of Krishna and Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who made this knowledge easily available through the process of chanting Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare." (p. 9.)

So one thing at least Krishna Consciousness has in common with all other modern Hindu cults from India: they all teach short cuts to salvation.

— M.A. Samad