

# Universalist Radha- Krishnaism

A Theological Perspective



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Dedicated to spreading the fruits  
of following and teaching  
Radha-Krishnaism for fifty years.  
May swanlike essence seekers  
read my words with joy.

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## **Abbreviations**

BG — *Bhagavad Gita*

CB — *Chaitanya-bhagavata*

CC — *Chaitanya Charitamrita*

HM — *Hindu Encounter With Modernity*

KS — *Krishna Samhita*

PT — *Process Theology*

SB — *Srimad Bhagavata*

TB — *The Bhagavata*

## Foreword

In *Universalist Radha-Krishnaism: A Theological Perspective*, Steve Bohlert offers a rigorous theology to satisfy the needs of many of us, especially Westerners, who are looking for an eclectic perspective that also offers real intellectual rigor.

Why read this book? In the twenty-first century, we are presented with an unprecedented diversity of worldviews and perspectives. You are skeptical of many of the literal, factual claims of the major religions, but you cannot accept the idea that we are purely matter and that there is no spiritual dimension to reality. Maybe you are seeking a spiritual and religious perspective that evenly balances what you know to be the male and female energies that permeate reality, but you know that you cannot live up to all of the demands and restrictions of many Eastern faiths. You may wish to honor the divinities of your ancestors, but need something to explain that which holds all of the different pantheons and faiths together.

Steve Bohlert is in a unique position to address your concerns. He has had graduate school training in theology and has had experiences that are rarely to be found. Additionally, he was officially initiated into the tradition of the famous Hindu saint, Chaitanya,

by an authorized representative of that tradition.

In this book, Steve Bohlert offers and explains the idea that, yes, there is a Supreme Being, and that Supreme Being is best conceptualized as a "Divine Couple," which suggests that the universe—and your very existence—is the product of the inconceivable love between Radha and Krishna, who represent the eternal, all-loving force that created all of us for the sake of a beautiful, loving relationship with all of Creation. His view is non-sectarian, which means that you may combine this divine story of love with the culturally specific customs, beliefs, and traditions that you possess as a result of your unique location in this world.

Steve Bohlert skillfully synthesizes the best of the Chaitanya tradition with modern philosophy to produce a spiritual path that may very well give you the strength and optimism to live a full, happy, and meaningful life. You may live with the confidence that your love for the Supreme is deeply yearned for and desired by your Creators—"God-dess"—the Divine Couple, Radha-Krishna.

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# Introduction

*Universalist Radha-Krishnaism: A Theological Perspective* offers a transformative vision of reality that addresses the needs of contemporary people for a wholistic spirituality. My approach to theology reflects my experiences as a Hindu monk, Christian pastor-teacher, and contemplative mystic.

While studying in the progressive environment of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California for three years (1988-91), I came to call myself a process-liberation theologian, and that perspective continues in my ministry today. Process thought originated with Alfred North Whitehead.

Whitehead's vision provides a constructive, yet humble, metaphysical vision through its emphasis on the following: the interdependence of life, non-sensory experience as the primary mode of perception (the experience of causal relationships, or unconscious causal efficacy, as prior to and foundational for the more sophisticated experiences of presentational immediacy), non-local causation (action at a distance, thus, making room for mystical experiences and the impact of intercessory prayer on other persons), panexperientialism (the affirmation that all concrete actualities embody some level of experience), the continuity of

mind and body, theistic naturalism, and panentheism (the affirmation that God is immanent within the creative process, working within the dynamic, evolving, and contextual laws of nature). (PT 16-17)

Process thought is useful for religions in general and has been used with several. Progressive Christian thought grounds my theological approach in the western tradition. Many similarities exist between Christian devotion and Radha-Krishna devotion. Their basic concepts are transferable because of their universal nature—as confirmed by Bhaktivinode Thakur:

The religious principles taught by . . . Jesus Christ are similar to the religious principles taught by Vaishnava sects. (KS 8)

As an eclectic universalist, I firmly believe cross pollination of religions brings a fuller understanding of truth. The liberal reformed tradition welcomed my background as a Radha-Krishna devotee as an asset for Christian ministry, and I saw my Christian ministry as a western version of Radha-Krishna devotion.

Modern people live in a pluralistic world open to truth in many forms. This unique opportunity allows seekers to take the best teachings and practices of all paths and integrate them into a multifaceted whole, which gives a fuller picture of Truth than any one path alone could.

*Universalist Radha-Krishnaism: A Theological Perspective* is my gift to you in celebration of teaching Radha-Krishna devotion for fifty years. May it further your self realization of the divine.



Thank you to Neil R. Rasmussen, Michael Valle, and Jahnava Baldassarre for reading and commenting on the manuscript, Michael Valle for the foreword, and Zvonimir Tomic for the cover painting of Radha.

## Essential Teachings

- God-dess means god-goddess, the Divine Couple, Radha-Krishna, energy-energetic, ground of all becoming, primal cause.
- God-dess is known through scriptures, spiritual teachers, devotion, innate knowing, and spiritual teachings of all cultures through the ages to varying degrees.
- While recognizing truth in all authentic spiritual paths, Universalist Radha-Krishnaism focuses on creating an indigenous, western expression of devotion to God-dess based on the teachings of Bhaktivinode Thakur. It employs interfaith studies and critical analytical methods of interpretation.
- Universalist Radha-Krishnaism establishes a living, evolving process of God-dess realization rooted in traditional, Indian devotion, yet updated to preserve the essentials and discard unnecessary cultural practices that alienate practitioners from contemporary society.
- Natural devotion is based on principles of liberty, truth, and love. It combines devotion-al love with intellectual honesty and openness. Devotees open themselves to God-dess' leading through total self-surrender.
- Practitioners live as spiritual beings on Earth, one with Earth and life. God-dess pervades all. Practitioners embrace a lifestyle of simple living and high thinking. They offer all to

God-dess as a living sacrifice of love, are vessels of divine love, and live in accord with eternal spiritual values. Devotees live in the present as fully participating members of local and global society, working for the well-being of all, according to their ability.

- Practitioners work in coalition with those of like mind to address issues of peace, justice, and the environment. They seek commonalities rather than differences so that love may unite all people as the realm of God-dess manifests on Earth.
- This transitory life involves much suffering even in the best of times. Therefore, practitioners only pass through the material plane and evolve their consciousness to enter an eternal spiritual existence beyond spacetime. They then dwell in the world of Radha-Krishna with their eternal spiritual associates.
- Practitioners do not earn their way there, but open themselves to God-dess' love and grace. All God-dess asks in return is love. Establishing a loving relationship with Radha-Krishna is the key. There is no one way this love develops. Devotees each find their unique way to God-dess as God-dess attracts them.
- By clarifying their vision of the spiritual world and transferring their thoughts and desires from here to there, at the inevitable time of death, practitioners let go of this life

and enter the next as if walking through a doorway.

- Practitioners pursue their ultimate best interests in this life and the next. Eternity exists now. This life naturally flows into the next based on a person's actions and desires. Devotees seek full realization of their true nature in loving relationship to Radha-Krishna in their eternal spiritual world.



Bhaktivinode Thakur

## **1. Cultural Adaptation**

If reason and argument is combined with ancient beliefs, then all the accumulated mass of misconceptions will be destroyed, and in due course of time the odor of infamy will be eradicated from the people of India; then their knowledge will regain its health. (KS)

Yet, an unchanging faith, closed off to the insights of a changing world, eventually renders ancient traditions irrelevant to the questions of seekers and the most vital ethical, spiritual, and planetary issues of the twenty first century.  
(PT 120)

In nineteenth century India, Bhaktivinode Thakur (1838-1914) began using reason and argument to make his native religion more acceptable to modern western educated people who, like him, had become alienated. He presented new ways of looking at spirituality in contemporary terms and began the process of Westernizing and universalizing the teachings.

As his representative through his son and student Lalita Prasad Thakur, I am tasked with adapting these teachings for twenty-first century Westerners, which is a far greater hermeneutical leap. I am inspired by Goddess within, who prepared me for this challenge through a unique set of life experiences. I ask my readers, especially those of Vaishnava faith, to not judge me harshly before understanding what I am doing—presenting the traditional teachings in a way I hope will be appealing to seekers. Thus, I present a nonsectarian version of Radha-Krishna devotion.

Bhaktivinode saw a progressive revelation of truth. As a college-educated civil servant in British colonial East India, he synthesized

western analytical thought, Unitarian Christian theology, and traditional Chaitanyaism to appeal to other well-educated Bengalis.

He felt that when Radha-Krishnaism migrated to the West, as it now has, Radha-Krishnaism would benefit by the interaction. As an essence seeker, he concerned himself with eternal spiritual truths rather than their external manifestations.

This is a scientific consideration of truths regarding religious principles. Those who consider their own religious principles as real *dharma* and others' religious principles as irreligion or subreligion are unable to ascertain the truth due to being influenced by prejudice. Actually religious principles followed by people in general are different only due to the different qualifications of the practitioners, but the constitutional religious principles of all living entities are one. It is not proper for swanlike persons to reject the religious principles that people in general follow according to their situation. Therefore, with due respect to the religious principles followed by people in general, we will now discuss the living entities' constitutional religious principles. (KS 8)

Bhaktivinode separated received tradition that is subject to analysis, criticism, and change, from transcendent reality that is beyond logic, intellect, and language. He

understood the distinction between religious faith and belief, thereby freeing devotees to create lifestyles that allow westerners to use the spiritual practices of Chaitanyaism without unnecessary alienation from western culture by imitating Indian dress, social orders, customs, and antiquated belief systems.

Thought is progressive. He is the best critic, who can show the further development of an old thought . . . Progress certainly is the law of nature and there must be corrections and developments with the progress of time. (TB 1)

Bhaktivinode recognized the need for the tradition's spiritual and cultural adaptation to time, place, and audience. He identified with his contemporary religious thinkers, like the American transcendentalist writer Ralph Waldo Emerson, as fellow universalist essence seekers able to transcend the limitations of their own spiritual culture and value the essence of other spiritual traditions.

Emerson beautifully shows how all the words in moral philosophy originally came from the names of material objects. (TB 21)

This is a glimpse of Truth and we must regard it as Truth itself: often, says Emerson, a glimpse of truth is better than an arranged system and he is right. (TB 27-28)

Furthermore, Bhaktivinode approached the divine through faith rooted in innate spiritual intuition that allows freedom and creativity for new revelations of spiritual truth by the inner teacher—cosmic consciousness. Universalist Radha-Krishnaism offers one new revelation. God-dess still speaks today and reveals eternal truth in ever fresh ways. As Shukavak Dasa points out:

Bhaktivinoda . . . felt that the phenomenal could be the object of logical scrutiny, but that which transcended logic should only be approached by the innate seeing ability of the soul called *sahaja-samadi*. Religious faith, unfettered by rational processes, is the key to unlock that ability. *Sahaja-samadhi* is the soul's natural faculty which everyone possesses, except that in most people the ability has been diminished due to occlusion by the rational mind. (HM 148)

I believe the term is Bhaktivinoda's translation of Emerson's idea of natural intuition that appears throughout American Transcendentalism and nineteenth century Unitarianism. Theodore Parker similarly speaks of the "instinctive intuition of the divine." (HM 156)

Another name for Universalist Radha-Krishnaism is the Way of Natural Devotion based on this idea.

Bhaktivinode is a shining example and inspiration to progressive thinkers in the way he dealt with spiritual issues of his time. He wrote his seminal work, *Sri Krishna Samhita*, in 1880. In the preface, he declares:

If one considers history and time according to reason and argument, there will be great benefit for India. By this, one can also hope to make gradual advancement on the path towards the ultimate goal of life. If reason and argument is [sic] combined with ancient beliefs, then all the accumulated mass of misconceptions will be destroyed, and in due course of time the odor of infamy will be eradicated from the people of India; then their knowledge will regain its health.

While European philosophical and theological thought influenced his thinking, Bhaktivinode was most taken with Chaitanya's devotion to Radha-Krishna (although in his younger days he dismissed such devotion as simple, emotional religion for common, uneducated people). Many of Bhaktivinode's educated peers rejected devotion as backwards.

Thus in *Krishna Samhita*, Bhaktivinode appeals to thinking people to reconsider the *Bhagavat*, which teaches devotion to Krishna, using modern critical interpretation like British orientalists. He used modern scholarly research tools to date historical events such as writing

scriptures. For example, following a scholarly examination of evidence, he concluded that the *Bhagavata* was written around 900 CE, while tradition said it was written close to 3000 BCE.

The modern scholars also say that *Srimad Bhagavatam* appeared in Dravida-desa (South India) about 1,000 years ago. [Ninth century CE] (KS 42)

Bhaktivinode saw a scholarly critical approach to faith as good for India and for personal spiritual advancement. Bhaktivinode and many of his peers felt traditional devotion needed intellectual scrutiny to free it from misconceptions and make it acceptable to modern, well educated people. Indeed this is still true today.

When people become integrated—using faith and reason, right and left cerebral hemispheres, body, mind, and spirit—they may thoroughly examine and analyze their faith, remove outdated beliefs and practices, and put it back together even more superbly.



Bhaktivinode saw the necessity of adapting traditional devotional practices to the needs of the audience. This is especially true as teachings move from one society to another producing regional differences that need not be seen as sectarianism. A viable theology both reflects and shapes the society it addresses. It is

meant to affect how we live our lives now and eternally. As Bruce Epperly writes:

Sin may also involve the turning away from God's aim at creative transformation by holding on to outworn traditions. In seeking to preserve a particular tradition or way of life, we may be standing in the way of the future God intends for us and our communities. We may be stifling the imaginative and innovative possibilities that are part of what it means to be created in the image of God. Process theology recognizes the importance of tradition and the preservation of the values of our faith and culture, but these are always subject to transformation in light of changing social and cultural situations. (PT 88)

My goal is to make Radha-Krishnaism come alive in ever-fresh ways that enhance practitioners' imaginative realizations in this world and the next.

Any theology which claims to describe the ultimate generalities that characterize our lives must ultimately mirror people's language and ordinary experience. . . . theology, at its best, seeks to transform people's lives by providing an insightful vision of reality that enables persons to find meaning, inspiration, and challenge. (PT 3)

Bhaktivinode saw devotion as a progressive process that adapts to time and circumstance. Truth is not static; it is dynamic. There is not one Truth, but many truths. There is not one Way, but many ways. Bhaktivinode saw things pluralistically, from a nonsectarian universalist perspective.

In articulating a theology of world religions, process theology supports “the view that the insights of the many religions are different but complementary, such that no religion contains all the truth even as all contain some of the truth.” (PT 142)

Nonsectarian devotion remains the eternal religious principle. How can people achieve this ideal? Love is the answer. All who love are sisters and brothers. When people see themselves as part of God-dess’ extended family, as brothers and sisters in the world family, then they can solve problems cooperatively.

Bhaktivinode did not believe in rote repetition from one generation to the next. Each generation contributes to the evolution of thought. “The student is to read the facts with a view to create, and not with the object of fruitless retention.” (TB 1) More complex forms evolve from simpler forms.

He understood essential truth is of two varieties—its original form and the way people receive it. This relates to exegesis and

hermeneutics, the process of using scholarly techniques to understand what a scriptural passage meant in its earliest setting for the original intended audience, and then using an interpretive process to derive its meaning for today's audience.

Bhaktivinoda states, "Essential truth is of two types: original form (*svarupam*) and in relation to the people who will receive it (*sambandikam*)." Paul Tillich suggests a similar idea when he describes theology as "a statement of the truth of the Christian message and the interpretation of this truth for every new generation." Theology, thus understood, has two poles: a statement of what is held to be eternal truth and an interpretation of that statement in terms of the temporal or historical situation in which the eternal truth must be understood. Satisfying the demands of both these poles is, of course, the role of the theologian. (HM 154)

There are essential truths in the scriptures that need reinterpretation for every new generation, especially when the people receiving that truth are of a different cultural and religious background than the originating culture. While maintaining the essential truth of a passage, people may apply it differently today than they would have five hundred years

ago, or even yesterday, or from one audience to the next.

While the recognition of certain aspects of divine are more pronounced in particular cultural contexts, all faith communities identify aspects of the divine from the vantage point of their particular cultural and spiritual history. (PT 143)

Each audience calls for a unique performance of truth according to its understandings and needs. Everyone is at a different stage of spiritual experience. Therefore, they need a different word of truth. As Martin Luther said, "That may be the word of God for you, but it's not for me." Practitioners need not accept everything the tradition says.

Revelation continues and we are part of it: like our predecessors, described in the scriptural witness, contributing our lives and words to the Spirit's revealing in our time and place. With our parents in the faith, our openness to God's transformative power in the reading of scripture enables us to share in and contribute to God's ongoing revelation in human life.

Process theologians maintain that critique of certain scriptural passages is a reflection of our fidelity to God's revelation in the scriptural tradition and in human experience. (PT 127)

India, especially Vrindavana when I lived there over forty years ago, was extremely conducive to developing love of Radha-Krishna. There was a tremendous amount of cultural support for spiritual life. Radha-Krishna devotion is a product of Indian spiritual culture developed over millennia. To most Westerners, it seems quite foreign. Yet some people bridge the spiritual, cultural divide and appreciate its essential spiritual truths. Universalist Radha-Krishnaism practitioners relish the spiritual essence, live a western lifestyle, and harmoniously adapt the teachings to western culture.

In *The Bhagavata* Bhaktivinode writes,

Liberty then is the principle, which we must consider as the most valuable gift of God. We must not allow ourselves to be led by those who lived and thought before us. We must think for ourselves and try to get further truths which are still undiscovered. In the . . . *Bhagavata* we have been advised to take the spirit of the Shastras [scriptures] and not the words. The *Bhagavata* is, therefore, a religion of liberty, unmixed truth, and absolute love. (32)

Bhaktivinode's idea of faith based on natural intuition allows freedom and creativity for new revelations of spiritual truth free of past tradition. God-dess creates unrest because existence is process, and God-dess is the root of it. Life enables God-dess and individuals to enjoy

ever fresh, novel experiences that add zest to life. When people live in harmony with God-dess, nature, and all beings, they will experience life as God-dess intends.

As the source of the initial aim, God not only guides the evolving order of the universe, but also brings forth new possibilities in our lives and in the cosmic adventure. . . . faithfulness to God calls us to cherish the past as well as to embrace the present in the context of God's visions for the future, be it the next moment or the horizon of history. More than that, God is the restless source of possibility, urging the universe at every level, toward greater levels of complexity and intensity of experience. The Divine Eros not only presents us moment by moment with new possibilities, but also gives us the energy and desire to realize these possibilities in our personal and community lives. (PT 45-46)

The combination of order and unrest maximizes enjoyment. Life is indeed ordered, but order best not be excessive and stifle intense enjoyment of experience. A fluid order, open to smooth change as part of the ongoing progress of life is optimal.

God-dess provides such order because by nature, God-dess is both ordered and filled with novelty and unrest. Order produces goodness, and with novelty, together they

increase enjoyment. Order serves personal love that is always fresh and exciting. A delightful balance between novelty and order provides the highest enjoyment.

As people progress from lower to higher states of enjoyment and order, chaos needs to reign sometimes. What was once in harmony with God-dess' will may not harmonize today. Everything changes. Therefore, people need fresh ways to relate with God-dess.

Humans and God-dess participate in a great adventure into an unknown future with vast potential for intense enjoyment as well as tragic beauty. It started with God-dess' dream. The end is not yet realized. Meanwhile, practitioners experience life fully and enjoy each moment. The outcome remains uncertain. The future is open.

We may creatively choose to embody positive ideals that go in a different direction than God's ideal for the moment. In the open system universe, our creativity and freedom is not necessarily a fall from grace, even when it diverges from God's vision, but an adventure in action and imagination that enables God and us to do new things. Although God's primordial vision is intimate and global, and embraces infinite possibilities, process theology suggests that God can be imagined as an intimate, creative, and freedom

supporting parent, who says to her child, "Surprise me, do something I hadn't fully expected, so that together we can bring about something new and exciting." Grace abounds in the world and in our lives, according to process theology, encouraging rather than condemning creaturely initiative. God wants us to do new things and shape the grace we have received in accordance with our own self-determination. (PT 47)

God-dess does not sanction the status quo or will it to be so. The status quo is a result of human free will interacting with God-dess' aim and past history. A grand evolutionary process develops higher states of consciousness to more fully enjoy experience, and it uses the status quo temporarily to advance this end. However, the status quo must give way to new ways of harmonious conscious being to fulfill its natural function. Everything is in process and should not be concretized in the sense of "made permanent" or unchanging.

. . . [T]he Spirit is profoundly iconoclastic, blowing where it will as it challenges every status quo and religious legalism to embrace wider understandings of grace, revelation, and liberation. (PT 81)

Radha-Krishnaism comes out of a medieval Indian context, which gives its particular flavor, form, and emphasis. As it meets new contexts, it must adapt. The language, images, and

practices that work in the tradition's native context may not produce the same effects in a new foreign context. Therefore, Universalist Radha-Krishnaism adapts Radha-Krishna devotion to the current western context.

This is confirmed by Bhaktivinode in his *Sri Krishna-samhita*:

When *acaryas* [teachers] first ascertain and instruct the Truth, it is not polluted with sectarianism. But the rules and regulations received through disciplic succession regarding the goal and the method of achieving it are changed in due course of time according to the mentality and locale of the people. A rule that is followed by one society is not necessarily accepted in another society. That is why one community is different from another. (4)

Before certain possibilities may be actualized, other possibilities must be actualized first. Considering a person's history and present circumstances, he or she may or may not be able to actualize certain aspects of a belief system. People must work out their spirituality from where they stand and determine what is realistic for them.

While traditional Radha-Krishnaism contains universal truth, it also contains numerous practices and beliefs particularly derived from and relevant to medieval Indian culture. Some are transferable and others not. By de-empha-

sizing secondary, cultural externals, the lives and universal teachings of Radha-Krishna, Chaitanya, and their friends become more accessible to Westerners.

The more impurities arising from time and place are removed, the more the beauties of the spiritual science shine brightly before us. (KS 54)

Radha-Krishna and their eternal associates serve as paradigmatic individuals. Five hundred years ago, Chaitanya and his associates presented an updated paradigm of devotional life. Buddha and Jesus serve as other paradigmatic individuals who incarnated in different times and places. Since human existence changed drastically in the past hundred years, paradigms need constant updating to remain relevant.

Today, there is little reason for western devotees to go to India. The spiritual knowledge of Radha-Krishna is available in the West, many of the advanced old teachers are gone, and many traditional practices are not useful here but are counterproductive.

Further, since God's presence is universal, then every event and encounter has the potential of becoming an epiphany, a revelation of God's vision for our lives and communities. In the quest for the divine, we don't have to travel to far off places or confine ourselves to holy sites; God is here, in, and with us. (PT 128)



People generally consider philosophy and religion separate fields. Philosophy questions the ontological existence of god, and religious devotees unquestioningly serve a manifestation of god. Universalist Radha-Krishnaism consists of a philosophical, religious tradition with a comprehensive theology developed over a period of more than two thousand years coupled with contemporary process thought. Universalist Radha-Krishnaism is not a religion but a nonsectarian, non-dogmatic spiritual movement.

Krishna, Buddha, Socrates, Jesus, and Chaitanya created new structures of existence. They developed new ways of being and looking at life, and their messages remain instrumental today. Universalist Radha-Krishnaism presents Chaitanya's teachings through a contemporary, devotional vision that gives faith new life. Forms and languages of the past carry less importance than living faith connected to present needs and opportunities.

Universalist Radha-Krishnaism interacts with other spiritual, religious, philosophical, scientific, cultural, and metaphysical world-views benefiting from their truths and incorporating them when compatible. Practitioners do not cling to a dead past and adopt an insular, self-protective stance. They treat predecessors with respect, build on their revelations, and go forward. Revelation is ongoing and did not end

with Chaitanya or anyone else. God-dess actively reveals truth today.

Further, because God is constantly evolving in relationship to the world, continuously integrating new possibilities with everlasting love, process theology believes that fidelity to God means willingness to be creatively transformed through commitment to our ongoing personal and communal integration of tradition and novelty. While we can never attain finality in the quest to experience or describe God's presence in the world, our openness to creative transformation deepens and expands our understanding of God's ever-evolving aim at salvation or wholeness in our world. (PT 123)

Practitioners open themselves to new valid insights, regardless of their source, and adjust to them like scientists of spirit on an open ended quest. God-dess, as creative transformation, calls people to a new vision of Radha-Krishna as universal divine love and offers ever fresh opportunities to enjoy this life and the next harmoniously.

## 2. God-dess

I use the term God-dess as a universal expression that recognizes the ground of becoming is both masculine and feminine—the Divine Couple, Radha-Krishna. God-dess is not limited to previous understandings of Radha-Krishna or the patriarchal image God invokes. God-dess, a less familiar term than God, frees people to imagine new images of the divine.

Universalist Radha-Krishnaism speaks of God in a manner philosophically and religiously opposed to the term's general understanding. God-dess does not mean the cosmic moralist who gives a long list of unchanging, absolute laws, codes, rules, and regulations people must follow under threat of punishment either in this life or the next. Rather, God-dess wants people to enjoy life fully in relationship with him-her, others, and all creation. God-dess gives abundant grace to all. However, those who act out of egoism and selfishly harm others face consequences under the law of karma. God-dess, ultimate reality, exists as a social being in dynamic interaction with all non-divine entities.

In the way they offer themselves to me,  
in just that way I offer my love to them  
reciprocally. Human beings follow my  
path universally, O Partha. (BG 4.11)

God-dess exists without a chance of not existing and is supreme in love, knowledge,

and power. In the divine, existence and essence are identical. Rather than an unchangeable, passionless absolute who remains aloof from and unaffected by the world, God-dess intimately relates to the world, enjoying and responding to and through all beings. God-dess has unlimited ability to influence, know, and care for individuals in any possible world. God-dess dynamically experiences and adapts to creation. God-dess remains ever-fresh like youth or spring.

I am the same toward all beings; no one is either hated or dearly loved by me. Yet those who, with an offering of love, offer their love to me—they are in me and I also am in them. (BG 9.29)

God-dess does not function as the controlling power who micromanages the world, deciding who lives and who dies, or other myriad details of life. God-dess set the processes of creation in motion. Those processes work according to natural laws, and God-dess does not suspend them to perform miracles. Acting within natural laws, God-dess uses persuasion rather than coercion to carry out his-her will. For example, Krishna taught Arjuna the *Bhagavad Gita* to encourage him to do his duty as an act of devotion, but it was up to Arjuna's free will decision how to act.

Thus for you this knowledge, which is a greater secret, is made known by me. Having fully grasped this, with nothing

overlooked, then act as you so choose.  
(BG 18.65)

In describing the relationship between divine possibility and creaturely decision making, Whitehead notes that the quality and intensity of God's influence on the world is limited by our past history, including our choices. . . . God's impact on a particular moment of experience is congruent with naturalistic causal relationships rather than being an abstract supernatural intervention. . . . Even in the realm of joining possibility with actuality, God does not act unilaterally or abstractly, but by presenting each moment with a vision of the best possible outcomes, or array of possibilities, and the energy to embody God's ideal on its own terms. God's power is revealed in love and persuasion and not domination. (PT 46)

God-dess manifests personally as Radha-Krishna, impersonally as the undifferentiated one, and as an immanent, all-pervading presence—cosmic consciousness.

More limiting definitions of god are easier to disprove. God-dess is unlimited and undefinable. Do not worship a god that cannot stand up to intellectual scrutiny.

However, all language and human understanding remain inherently inadequate. Humans can never fully comprehend God-dess.

Rather, people get glimpses through grace. Each religious or spiritual path contains its own particular view of God-dess from the perspective of its culturally derived realizations.

## **2.1 Means of Knowing God-dess**

Although proper examples to illustrate the Absolute Truth are unavailable in this material world, indirect examples are sometimes found. Just as fire and heat cannot exist separately, the Absolute Truth and His energies do not exist separately. (KS 73)

God-dess is known through faith accompanied by an intense, all-consuming desire to know. Devotees of Radha-Krishna believe in a spiritual world that pervades everything in a different dimension. People can relate to God-dess' immanent presence. When practitioners develop a personal relationship with God-dess, they feel his-her presence. They need not simply believe in God-dess but can know for themselves. Yet all humanity's knowing remains just a glimmer of God-dess' glory.

Devotional scriptures describe sacred reality present right here:

There is nothing else superior to me, O  
Conqueror of Wealth. On me, all this

[universe] is strung like pearls on a thread. I am the taste in water, O Kaunteya; I am the radiance of the moon and the sun, the sacred utterance in all the Vedas, the sound in space, the prowess in men. The pure fragrance in earth and the brilliance in fire am I. The life in all beings and the austerity in austere persons am I. As the seed of all beings, know me to be the eternal, O Partha. Among the discerning, I am discernment; of the splendid, I am splendor. (BG 7.7-10)

Krishna told his girlfriends that they could never ever be separated because he is all pervading like the elements—earth, water, fire, air, and ether. As they exist in all created things, so he exists within everyone.

The glorious Lord says: Your separation from Me, the material cause of all (and therefore present in all as their very Self), is not possible under any circumstance. (Just) as the (five gross) elements—(viz.,) ether, the air, fire, water and earth—are present in (all) created beings (as their constituents), so am I, underlying as I do the mind, the vital airs, the elements, the Indriyas (the five senses of perception and the five organs of action) and the (three) Gunas (modes of Prakriti). In Myself (as the ground) do I create, maintain and (then) dissolve

Myself (in the form of the cosmos) by  
dint of My own Maya (creative energy)  
by Myself in the form of the elements,  
the Indriyas and the Gunas. (SB  
10.47.28-29)

These passages and others present an immanent spiritual presence seekers can readily relate to and experience in their lives. Thus, God-dess can be known by subjective perception.

The Spirit's movements in human life are reflected in trans-rational or mystical moments of experience. Process theology understands mysticism as a holistic phenomenon, opening new dimensions of spiritual experience and social concern. Wherever the Spirit is present, it inspires us to affirm God's intimate presence in the diversity of life in light of oneness of all creation and God's aim at healing the earth. (PT 81)

## 2.2 Materials for Chaitanya's Philosophy

Although Chaitanya was known as a great scholar and philosopher, he left no writings of his own. Still, as the founder of a devotional movement, it seems natural that he formulated the philosophical teachings of his school. He empowered his learned followers to develop and spread them.

Chaitanya especially commissioned the erudite Sanatan, Rupa, Jiva, Gopal Bhatt, and Raghunath Das *goswamins* to write. They left families and high level jobs to live ascetic lives in Vrindavana and collaborate on developing Chaitanya's teachings.

Chaitanya said the *Srimad Bhagavata* fully represents his teaching. Therefore, the *goswamins* base much of their writings on it. Just as people know Socrates and Jesus through their disciples' writings, people know Chaitanya through his disciples writings.

There are four important Bengali biographies of Chaitanya as well as three notebooks written on his life by his most intimate friends. *Chaitanya-bhagavat* and *Chaitanya-charitamrita* are the most authoritative biographies. These large works contain extensive philosophical discourses given by Chaitanya. Scholars regard them as important sources of Chaitanya's philosophy.

Vrindavana Das Thakur wrote *Chaitanya-bhagavat* shortly after Chaitanya's disappear-

ance. Krishna Das Kaviraj wrote *Chaitanya-charitamrita* some decades later. Both authors used authoritative firsthand accounts of Chaitanya's life from his intimate friends. Their purpose was to popularize the life and teachings of Chaitanya. As such, they are not like an objective modern biography. Rather, they create the myth of Chaitanya. It will require a major academic undertaking to separate historical fact from embellishment.

Nityanand requested his disciple, Vrindavana Das Thakur, to write the *Chaitanya-bhagavat* and provided him with firsthand accounts. Being an earlier work and coming out of Bengal, it is less philosophical, focuses on Chaitanya's early life, and gives more prominence to Nityanand. On the other hand, *Chaitanya-charitamrita* comes out of Vrindavana with major influence by the *goswamins*, which makes it more philosophical. It gives a fuller account of Chaitanya's whole life, especially the second half. Scholars generally consider it most authoritative and popular.

## 2.3 Sources of Knowledge

Traditional Chaitanyaism considers revelation the exclusive source of knowledge. In *Chaitanya-charitamrita*, Chaitanya tells Sanatan that scriptures are the only way to correct knowledge. Most western philosophers accept perception and inference as the only sources of knowledge. Chaitanya says perception and inference based on the senses are ultimately unreliable. Certainly, empiricism and rationalism have their limits. They are not capable of perceiving God-dess. However, scripture also has its limits. This is a longstanding controversy.

One example is the *Srimad Bhagavata* 5.22 that describes "The relative position of the planets and their movements" with the sun and planets revolving around the earth. Although some fundamentalists still promote this as literal fact, there is no way this outdated cosmology can compete with current scientific cosmologies.

Most of Chaitanya's fundamentalist followers take a literal view of scripture. According to legend, Vyasa, an incarnation of God-dess, wrote them, and they contain the actual words and deeds of gods, kings, and sages from the beginning of creation or before. Vyasa means "author." Many people wrote under that name and produced numerous scriptures over the centuries.

. . . it cannot be said that the author of the *Mahabharata* was the same Vyasa who divided the *Vedas* and received the title Vedavyasa at the time of Yudhisthira. . . . it appears that Vedavyasa first made a draft of the *Mahabharata*, and later on another Vyasa elaborated on it and presented that under the name of *Mahabharata*. (KS 37)

Those great personalities who wrote the scriptures were all known as Vyasas, and they were all respected by people in general. In this regard, the title Vyasa indicates all Vyasas, beginning from Vedavyasa up to the Vyasa who wrote *Srimad Bhagavatam*. (KS 42)

As I mentioned earlier, traditional devotees believe the *Bhagavat* and *Bhagavad Gita* date to circa 3,000 BCE. Bhaktivinode concludes along with contemporary scholars that the *Bhagavat* was written circa 900 CE. Likewise, many scholars date the *Gita* from the late third century BCE to the second century CE.

Often, fundamentalists deny the reliability of scholarly dates and instead accept a literal, pre-rational worldview populated by gods, goddesses, sages, and demons engaged in cosmic battles of good versus evil as objective history. They believe gurus perfectly preserved and transmitted this knowledge unchanged through the ages and that it contains literal information of life in the spiritual world beyond creation.

However, books such as the *Bhagavat* are superb myths that provide a fantastically beautiful worldview for this life and the next. They certainly contain high-level spiritual revelations. Yet people need not understand them as literal histories of occurrences on this physical plane of existence, although some correspondences may exist. They point to unknowable (but transcendently actual) events in metaphorical language people understand, but they do not correspond to historic events as Bhaktivinode explains:

Some people say that the Supreme Lord is omnipotent, therefore He may sometimes incarnate by His inconceivable energy in a material body, and all incarnations can therefore be accepted simply as historical incidents. According to the opinion of swanlike Vaishnavas, this statement is extremely unreasonable because it is impossible for Lord Krishna to accept a material body and perform material activities. Such action would be insignificant and abominable for Him. But His appearance and pastimes in the hearts of the realized living entities are accepted by both the sadhus and Krishna. . . .

The pure activities of Krishna have been perceived through the *samadhi* of swanlike persons like Vyasadeva. Krishna's activities are not exactly historical like those of people under the clutches of *maya*, because

Krishna's activities are not limited to any time or place. Nor are His activities comparable with the activities of ordinary people. (KS 90-91)

Vedic scriptures contain revealed knowledge of God-dess, but that revelation came through Indian culture at different times. They represent how God-dess spoke to Indians in antiquity. What do they have to say to us today? This requires an interpretive leap.



Bhaktivinode foresaw the introduction of Chaitanyaism to the West as an evolutionary step employing a rational approach to faith rather than emotional superstition. Thus, Universalist Radha-Krishnaism accepts a scholarly view of scripture and history. It does not ask people to believe the unbelievable and deny their innate intelligence or a scientific view of manifest reality.

Natural devotees revere scriptures and love reading them. However, they reinterpret and update them for the twenty-first century using critical interpretative methods. Vedic scriptures contain fragments of eternal wisdom, but Westerners sometimes find them difficult to approach due to strong secondary cultural interference. Essence seekers harmonize revelation with objective reality and a rational approach to spirituality.

Universalist Radha-Krishnaism offers a holistic spiritual path. Being whole, healthy, and holy remain closely related. With truth and beauty as the goal, practitioners employ all available means to attain it. They combine the wisdom of today with the wisdom of antiquity to reach a fuller understanding.

A learned man takes the essence of knowledge from all places, just as a bumblebee collects honey from each and every flower. (*Bhag.* 4.18.2)(KS 59)

According to Bhaktivinode, perception and inference can be valid sources of knowledge when refined by devotion. He recommends primarily trusting personal innate intuition and questioning spiritual authorities. "*Samadhi*, or full absorption in the Supreme, is the primary and direct means of cultivation." (KS 49) Pleasing God-dess opens devotees to God-dess' presence within. People who are adverse never experience God-dess directly, but God-dess cannot hide from his-her devotees. Therefore, devotees may directly perceive truth within the limits of their embodied state.

The living entity who is situated in *samadhi* is his own *antaranga* guru.

An intelligent person, expert in perceiving the world around him and in applying sound logic, can achieve real benefit through his own intelligence. Thus sometimes one acts as one's own instructing spiritual master. (*Bhag.* 11.7.20) (KS 129)

The spirit's pure vision constitutes the mystic element in religion. Mystic vision is the source of revelation. The mystical teachings of various religions contain eternal wisdom and transcend sectarian boundaries.

From the standpoint of process theology, the reality of mystical experiences is undeniable. God is as near to us as our next breath, luring us forward through insights and encounters toward God's vision of beauty, truth, and goodness. (PT 128)

Mystical experience also transcends the scope of science and psychology. It allows mystics to experience God-dess directly. God-dess' spiritual potency enters a mystic's consciousness and enables direct perception of the spiritual dimension of reality beyond the material plane. Its effects in a mystic's life and in the philosophy that develops from it can be seen.

These often unexpected mystical moments or life-changing experiences occur as a result of the interplay of divine call and human response. The ongoing choice to be attentive to God's aim through spiritual practices enables us to more fully experience God's vision for our lives in the moment as well as in the context of a lifetime. (PT 48)

When a mystic goes from mystic experience itself to describing the experience, it becomes another thing entirely. Then people may

consider the personality and qualifications of the mystic as well as the milieu being addressed. The description becomes part of accumulated tradition that remains subject to objective, critical scrutiny, especially when approached with a devotional attitude.

God-dess dwells in the hearts of all and can completely infuse people with spiritual potency that transforms their entire being to a spiritual nature suitable for self-realization. When devotees establish a loving relationship with God-dess, they employ a subjective process guided by scripture, tradition, and teachers, but each practitioner finds their own unique path no one traveled before.

One acts according to one's own nature, even a person of knowledge, for beings follow their nature—what shall repression accomplish?

Better is one's own dharma even if imperfect than another's dharma followed perfectly. Better is death in following one's own dharma, for another's dharma brings danger." (BG 3.33,35)



Mystic experience's immediate, intuitive nature signifies realization of truth that cannot come through a conceptual system however logically articulated. Yet, mystic experience is not irrational. Intuition gives the spirit new immediacy in direct understanding of God-

ness. Then beliefs are no longer a doctrine but a life. Mystics immerse themselves in the process to such a degree that they live the myth, and the myth lives them.

In their outer body, devotees see themselves as part of the living tradition of disciplic lines connected to Chaitanya. They transmit this wisdom to future generations by interpreting myth through word and deed. Thus, they embody the myth and are non-different from it.

It helps to compartmentalize the mind. Yes, the *Bhagavat* was probably written around eleven hundred years ago and could not possibly contain literal accounts of everything. Yet, a second naiveté develops in which the pastimes are read and meditated on as actual events within the narrative world as described. Devotees also imagine variations on the pastimes in which they involve themselves as participants in their spiritual body providing Radha-Krishna with novel experiences.

Devotees need not reject philosophical systems of thought, but use them as springboards for the mystical journey. Chaitanya insisted on the rational nature of mystical experience, and his followers did their best to systematize his teachings in a logical manner. However, the logical intricacy of a system of thought does not prove its objective reality. Chaitanyaism contains detailed analysis of emotional states, levels of love, spiritual

pastimes, descriptions of God-dess' forms and their interrelationships ad infinitum. It reveals a great mine of spiritual wisdom developed over millennia by a highly spiritual civilization. This does not make it literally real, but it does contain a wealth of relevant spiritual insights.

Philosophy comes closer to poetry or art by embodying an idea or expression of a feeling, than to scientific discoveries or technical inventions that are impersonal, measurable products of mind.

When devotees allow God-dess to permeate their life and enter into God-dess' life, they experience the true meaning of Chaitanya's manifestation revealed in their heart. This produces a living faith, and each generation is called to make a contribution to its development.

God-dess communicates divine knowledge to people in varied ways. God-dess lives in their hearts and directs their understanding. He-she takes the form of a spiritual teacher who guides people to realize the divine. She-he appears as the heard transcendental word received through the discipic line and embodied in scriptures.

The teacher embodies God-dess' mercy and may manifest in the heart as the universal guiding principle of life. The teacher may also manifest as a leading devotee who initiates and instructs. Teachers are fallible too, and Universalist Radha-Krishnaism encourages a

questioning, philosophical approach. A reciprocal relationship exists between teachers and students. Each remains accountable to the other.

Practitioners study scriptures pertaining to Radha-Krishna as sources of inspiration. They recognize divine truth revealed in all great world scriptures, as well as other ancient and modern spiritual writings. By studying broadly, people get a fuller picture of God-dess than that available in Vedic literature alone. By engaging esteemed writers in conversation, practitioners realize the common essence of all. With a vast spiritual knowledge base available, people need not be parochial in the search for universal truth. However, it seems wise to follow one path, with other traditions supplementing it to develop depth and focus.

Since the vast Vedic literature is not consistent in its approach or necessarily clear in what it says, Chaitanya and his followers focused on the *Bhagavat* as their main scripture. The *Bhagavat* interprets *Om*--the transcendental sound of eternal harmony. It deals with relationships between individuals, the world, and God-dess. It provides knowledge of God-dess' personality and individuals' relationship with him-her. It also describes the way to attain a relationship with God-dess and the purpose of seeking it. God-dess conceived in full perfection is the relation. Devotion is the way, and pure love is the goal.

## 2.4 Faith, Doubt, and Belief

Whoever, with faith, has offered love to whatever form that person desires to worship—upon every such person, I bestow this immovable faith.

Those who sacrifice to the divinities go to the divinities; those who offer their love to me, surely they come to me.

(BG 7.21,23b)

People's conscious beliefs and doctrines remain subordinate to what exists. Objective reality imposes itself regardless of conscious beliefs. Beliefs cannot change what is. Life places demands on people, and they must respond.

People often discern the truth of things better intuitively than rationally. Intuitive knowing comes from innate unconscious promptings from God-dess within. Intuitive knowing brings beliefs in line with deep wisdom and external realities because simply believing something does not make it a reality. Devotees seek psychic wholeness and consistency of action.

Beliefs matter. They influence emotions, attitudes, and actions. As beliefs spread, they have tremendous effects on the world. Beliefs can be positive or negative. People benefit by embracing life affirming, empowering, and loving beliefs, while rejecting the opposite.

Beliefs come and go. Do not cling to them, because faith does not depend on belief. Beliefs are like the furniture of faith: they can be reorganized, replaced, or set aside. Some beliefs develop faith more than others. Devotees need not believe the unbelievable, such as accepting the fantastic stories of the Puranas as literal history. They also need not accept outmoded beliefs of the past such as uncritical acceptance of a guru's teachings. Religious thought develops in a progressive evolutionary way.

Since beliefs shape character, purpose, emotions, attitudes, and behavior, seekers benefit by examining the appropriateness of their beliefs and adjusting them accordingly. People's current state represents the outcome of their previous beliefs, values, purposes, emotions, and actions. Practitioners act to ensure that the present leads to a future of maximum enjoyment.

Beliefs also help decide which potential experiences people select and emphasize. By focusing attention on certain elements of experience, people heighten conscious awareness of them and increase their effectiveness. For example, when devotees are conscious of and open to divine grace, an aspect of the universal experience of deity, they increase its benefits individually and collectively.

Most religious beliefs cannot be proven but are accepted as self-evidently true. People intuitively accept and understand far more than they can put into words. They accept a verbal expression of universal truth because it strikes a sympathetic chord and rings true in them. Reason and argument may help some accept it, but there must be that basic "Aha!"

Most religious doctrine describes primal universal experience, while emphasizing select features that differ from religion to religion. By studying the perspectives of various paths, people can get a fuller picture of universal religion.

In *The Bhagavat, Its Philosophy, Ethics and Theology*, Bhaktivinode writes, "Progress certainly is the law of nature and there must be corrections and developments with the progress of time." (1) Everything is in process, including God-dess, who exists beyond comprehension. Collective and individual realization of God-dess develops over time. If faith does not grow and develop, it stagnates and dies.

In *Dynamics of Faith*, leading twentieth century theologian, Paul Tillich describes faith as "ultimate concern" and a centered act involving the whole person. He also says what faith is not. It is not believing the unbelievable. A person's beliefs may change over a lifetime, yet their faith may remain solid.

What do people have faith in? Do they have faith in Radha-Krishna? The teachings of a

guru? What some old books say? The process of devotion? The grace of God-dess?

People may have faith and not believe anything. Beliefs form the content of faith and are expressed in symbols and myths. People may change and alter beliefs over time just as they replace or rearrange the furniture. Symbols and myths point to God-dess, but are not God-dess per se. Yet, they partake in the nature of God-dess and are simultaneously one and different from God-dess.



Bhaktivinode writes that these symbols are not based on material conceptions, but on what western thinkers like Plato, Carl Jung, and Joseph Campbell call archetypes. This world emanates from the spiritual world. Therefore, patterns seen here are derived from there, not vice versa. People do not project their patterns onto the spiritual world, but rather, this world acts like a distorted reflection of the spiritual world.

When people place their faith or ultimate concern in something that is not ultimate, idolatry occurs. This can take the form of nationalism, success, or taking the symbol to be the object itself. God-dess inherently remains beyond the limits of symbolic expression and conception.

Faith calls for a central act of total surrender to the object of faith. If taken seriously, it may

produce awesome results. Yet, what if the object of faith really is not ultimate? Doubt is an inherent part of faith. The seriousness of a person's doubt reflects the seriousness of their faith. Doubt must be met with courage. Dynamic faith includes and encourages doubt. That way faith grows and does not stagnate.



Universalist Radha-Krishnaism teaches the way of natural devotion, which involves a process of visualizing an eternal relationship with Radha-Krishna based on innate desire. Eternally loving Radha-Krishna remains the goal of life. Nothing else is more attractive. When devotees fully realize the Divine Couple and their abode, it will all be much more than they ever imagined.

So, doubt and question everything. Certainly God-dess is not offended by these things. Rather, they are signs of a true seeker. Doubting and questioning help practitioners realize truth, and in the process, faith develops and evolves dynamically. Question scriptures. Question tradition. Question teachers. If they are offended by questions or do not answer satisfactorily, they may not be the right person to follow.

### **3. Manifestations of Divinity**

As the one without birth, the everpresent Self, as the supreme Lord of beings presiding over my own nature, I become fully manifest by Maya, the very power of my Self. (BG 4.6)

Much evidence points to God-dess. Look around and see the beautiful, intricate designs everywhere in nature, both in organic and inorganic matter. See how life springs forth abundantly. These things do not happen by chance. When people see great constructions, such as the pyramids, they wonder who built them. When scientists look at the solar system and see the perfect order of the planets, they realize that if the earth were just a little bit closer or further from the sun, life on earth as we know it would not exist. Intricate laws of nature govern the universe making life as we know it possible. These laws did not happen by chance. Rather, an intelligent creator set them in motion along with the act of creation.

People exist because God-dess is a living person. Others are parts of that original person. Just as each piece of a hologram contains the full image, humans are microcosms of the macrocosm. Individuals exist because God-dess exists.

A strong longing for God-dess exists in human consciousness through the ages. People

hunger for food because food exists. Likewise, people long for home, security, and love because they exist. People may not have these things but know they exist. That constitutes the basis of longing. Longing for God-dess exists as an inherent part of human nature because humans are parts of God-dess. Devotees feed their spiritual hunger by loving and serving God-dess.

Scriptures and saints through the ages claim revealed experience of God-dess forming a huge database of evidence for God-dess' existence. Then, the philosophical and theological systems that developed out of these revelations argue for the existence of God-dess. The best of these make a rational, convincing case. Finally, people can trust their personal insights and revelations of God-dess more.

The existence of God-dess cannot be conclusively proved or disproved. God-dess exists beyond spacetime, reason, and conception as well as in spacetime, reason, and conception. Therefore, people can know God-dess to the degree they comprehend his-her self-revelation at the moment. So, it comes down to faith aided by intuition and reason. Faith is not contrary to reason, however, certain aspects of faith cannot be fully understood by us now and remain the great mystery.

### 3.1 Nature of the Absolute

Insufficient attention has been given to the kind of God in which one believes, often with disastrous results. (PT 31)

Universalist Radha-Krishnaism offers a panentheistic theology that sees God-dess in everything and everything in God-dess. The *Oxford American Dictionary* defines panentheism as "the belief or doctrine that God is greater than the universe and includes and interpenetrates it." The personal absolute enfolds even the formless, attributeless absolute, which Universalist Radha-Krishnaism calls undifferentiated oneness. God-dess includes the qualified and unqualified absolute in a higher synthesis.

God is more than anything we can imagine . . . God's relationship to the world is intimate and continuous rather than distant and discontinuous. God is not the "wholly other," but rather the "wholly present one," whose existence cannot be fully contained by the world. Without some degree of continuity between God and the world, divine love, relationship, and activity in the world are meaningless and irrelevant. (PT 28)

God-dess sympathetically experiences human happiness and pain out of pure love. As devotees develop love of Radha-Krishna, they learn to sympathetically experience their bliss more intensely than individuals experience bliss separately. God-dess creates infinite

beings for infinite new loving relationships. We appreciate God-dess' love being active as well as passive; it is as important that God-dess wills the good of the individual spirits as that he-she is affected by their happiness and distress.

He is eternally enjoying pastimes with the living entities as the Supersoul. The Supersoul reciprocates according to the mood and realization a living entity acquires while traveling on the path of fruitive activities. (KS 91)

Philosopher Charles Hartshorne states that "God orders the universe, according to *panentheism*, by taking into his own life all the currents of feeling in existence. He is the most irresistible of experiences because he himself is the most open to influence." (PT 45)

God-dess pervades creation and constitutes its guiding, ordering, designing principle, the ground of becoming, cosmic consciousness, the one from which many flow. Individuals exist as parts of God-dess, and like a piece of hologram or fractal, they contain the image of the whole. An individual is in the world, and the world is in the individual. God-dess within guides and directs through persuasive love. People freely choose how to respond. God-dess manifests most fully in devotees open to his-her transformative presence.

One who sees me everywhere and sees all things in me, to such a person I am never lost nor is such a person ever lost to me. (BG 6.30)

Words cannot fully express the infinite unbounded Absolute, but this does not mean it cannot be expressed. Universalist Radha-Krishnaism rejects the idea of the absolute as ultimately pure, undifferentiated being. The absolute must exist as a positive concept to be intelligible and real. Since nothing positive exists without attributes, the absolute must be qualified. Being infinite, the absolute must be determined and qualified in endless ways. It encompasses all and lacks nothing. The idea of personality remains consistent and essential to the infinite absolute. God-dess possesses character, which implies something definite and limiting, but God-dess remains unlimited in the sense of being immeasurable and all encompassing.

Those who wish to merge with the unqualified absolute may do so. Those who wish to develop a relationship with personal absolute God-dess may do so. The absolute encompasses all. Humans are finite, and God-dess is infinite. The infinite cannot be limited by human thought and words. A neatly defined god is too small.

Everything exists within the infinite Absolute. The infinite existence of God-dess logically excludes the existence of anything

other than God-dess. All existence consists of the energy of the absolute, who remains intrinsically related to it. Everything exists within God-dess, and she-he exists within everything. Speech and thought exist as parts of the infinite.

There is nothing else superior to me, O conqueror of Wealth. On me all this [universe] is strung like pearls on a thread. (BG 7.7)

Infinity and personality coexist as essential features of the absolute. Mere denial of qualities and attributes to the absolute remains imperfect and limiting. God-dess manifests infinite attributes and forms. God-dess' inconceivable nature implies levels of being and intelligence higher than our own. Naturally, the power of unlimited God-dess appears inconceivable to finite human minds.

God-dess remains without second. God-dess exists as the only reality. Pure self-luminous consciousness forms God-dess' body. God-dess constitutes the eternal principle, the highest good, and the highest bliss. God-dess exists as an essential unity above categorical difference. The absolute is one, but different religions use different names, forms, and attributes to describe it.

Some say the material world is categorically different from God-dess, but it is not self-existent. It exists as an energy of God-dess

and is therefore one and different from energetic God-dess.

God-dess' body and its owner are not two different principles like the difference between the body and spirit of beings in the physical world. God-dess' body and its owner consist of consciousness and bliss. The same eternal spiritual principle manifests God-dess' names, attributes, activities, and abodes. God-dess is non-different internally or externally.

God-dess possesses inconceivable power to manifest different forms without losing his-her oneness. God-dess remains one and indivisible yet expands innumerable forms and manifests in infinite ways to people according to their different tastes and modes of realization. Bhaktivinode writes,

It is very wonderful that the Supreme Lord is simultaneously and fully present everywhere—within the heart of all living entities and engaged in various pastimes. (KS 114-15)

God-dess manifests on three clear levels, as undifferentiated oneness, cosmic consciousness, and personal God-dess according to three paths of approach—respectively knowledge, meditation, and devotion. Of these three forms, each succeeding form supersedes and philosophically speaking, includes the preceding. God-dess, the highest manifestation, supersedes and includes undifferentiated oneness and cosmic consciousness.

Universalist Radha-Krishnaism identifies God-dess with the supreme persons, Radha-Krishna, the source of all incarnations, the ultimate ground of becoming in whom infinite grandeur, infinite powers, and infinite modes of divine bliss exist. All scriptures, either explicitly or implicitly, speak of God-dess as the ultimate reality.

God-dess, the highest being, perfectly manifests all auspicious qualities. Undifferentiated oneness exists as the incomplete manifestation of God-dess, in which divine attributes and potencies lie dormant. Dr. Kapoor explains:

It is primordial sameness, but not a barren stillness; it is indeterminateness, but not an indeterminateness that totally denies distinctions and definiteness; it has distinctions, but the distinctions are not clearly brought out; it is a creative potentiality, but a potentiality that is eternally actualized in its most perfect state as [God-dess]. (92)

God-dess' attributes and potencies exist in him-her essentially and eternally and are not unreal or superimposed. God-dess and her-his attributes and energies remain inseparable.

God-dess indulges in spiritual pastimes eternally. God-dess manifests a spiritual body, an eternal world, and eternal companions. Followers of the way of natural devotion realize God-dess' most perfect form. From their perspective, followers of the path of knowledge

realize undifferentiated oneness that symbolizes the divine luster of God-dess' spiritual body. Followers of the path of meditation realize cosmic consciousness pervading all.

God-dess' majestic qualities include:

- supporting and protecting the universe
- sustaining natural devotion
- leading devotees to the transcendental realm
- containing all beings
- existing within all.

Cosmic consciousness is higher than undifferentiated oneness in the hierarchy of manifestations as devotees understand the absolute. Undifferentiated oneness constitutes basic reality underlying all concrete formations. Cosmic consciousness cognizes and regulates concrete formations. From this perspective, cosmic consciousness implies a differentiated, qualified state of God-dess. Cosmic consciousness is qualified in a limited sense as a partial manifestation of God-dess, who is qualified in endless ways. Cosmic consciousness exists within beings and material nature consciously maintaining all.

God-dess relates to conditioned individuals and nature through cosmic consciousness. God-dess creates the world and enters it as cosmic consciousness. God-dess pervades, sustains, and regulates individual spirits and

the universe collectively and individually as cosmic consciousness.

God-dess possesses infinite energies, but according to Chaitanya, the spiritual energy, material energy, and individual spirits are primary. They exist in God-dess' nature. Spiritual energy constitutes the intrinsic self of God-dess, and forms the substratum of the transcendental world where God-dess displays transcendental forms and activities. Material energy externally relates to God-dess and causes the material world. It relates to God-dess in the sense that all energies ultimately inhere in God-dess. God-dess' perfect selfhood transcends the duality of matter and exists totally free of its influence.

People perceive the material universe as a spacetime manifestation. It appears real just as the world inhabited in dream seems real, but when dreamers wake up, they realize it was temporary. People consider the waking world to be reality, but it is another temporary dreamlike reality when viewed in comparison to our eternal life in Braj.

Some Vedic stories suggest a metaphor like this: suppose an expansion of God-dess sleeps and dreams this world. God-dess' dream creates a reality that goes on for billions of human years, measures billions of light years across, and seems so solid that many believe it is all that exists. Yet it is a passing dream.

This does not mean people do not exist. They exist as eternal, individual spirits. The idea is to give up false identification with one's temporary material situation. Even if life seems one big nightmare, it is good to know there is a better life upon awakening in the eternal reality of Braj.

God-dess' consciousness pervades the entire material creation, which is God-dess' dream. Everything is God-dess' energy and nothing is separate from her-him. Therefore, everything is ultimately spiritual. Because people see things as separate from God-dess, they are called material. When people realize the universe is God-dess' creation, simultaneously one and different from God-dess, they reach enlightenment. Then they remain awake within the dream and consciously relate to God-dess.

According to a story in the *Brahmavaivarta Purana*, Prakriti-khandam 2-3, Krishna impregnated Radha, and she gave birth to the universe. Thus, creation expresses God-dess' exuberant joy and love. It provides innumerable spirits an opportunity to consciously evolve and relate with God-dess thus satisfying God-dess' desire to enjoy ever increasing varieties of experience.

God-dess remains intimately involved with creation and creatures, rather than a distant high god who set creation in motion and now lets it work according to natural laws with no

further involvement. God-dess pervades all as the all-knowing and all-loving cosmic consciousness, but not as the all powerful controller.

God-dess is incredibly close. People can talk to God-dess. She-he hears, knows, feels, and experiences people's lives along with them. God-dess talks to and guides beings on the path of life. God-dess remains a constant presence with them. They are free to acknowledge God-dess' presence and follow God-dess' guidance or not.

Individual spirits share God-dess' spiritual nature but live in material nature until they are ready to fully enter the spiritual realm. The more people learn to experience God-dess and live responsibly, the faster they evolve to spiritual maturity. God-dess uses her-his attractiveness to entice all beings to the spiritual world to experience full existence.

The Vrindavana *goswamins* described spiritual energy as subdivided into three energies that correspond to existence, consciousness, and bliss. By the existential energy, God-dess maintains his-her own existence and the existence of individual spirits. By means of this energy, God-dess exists as an independent entity and supports all other things that derive their existence from him-her. Conscious energy makes God-dess omniscient and enables her-him to impart knowledge to others.

Blissful energy enables God-dess to enjoy bliss and infuses bliss into the hearts of loving devotees. The essence of the blissful energy is divine love. The fullest manifestation of divine love is Radha, the eternal consort or counter-whole of Krishna, the personal absolute. Just as Krishna possesses infinite divine energies in their highest perfection, Radha embodies those divine energies in their most developed form.

Krishna manifests infinite partial forms of the divine. Radha manifests infinite divine energies. Their relationship exhibits simultaneous oneness and difference. One entity assumes two-forms to enjoy divine love play. Radha-Krishna's bodies consist of bliss and consciousness. They share spiritual love. To maximize Krishna's bliss, Radha expands into innumerable partial manifestations as her girlfriends, who assist in Radha-Krishna's amorous pastimes and increase their bliss unlimitedly.

Blissful energy is identified with the intrinsic, perfect self of God-dess above all others. Other energies associated with partial aspects of God-dess remain subservient. Conscious energy is identified with cosmic consciousness and existential energy with undifferentiated oneness. The gradation of energies closely corresponds with the gradation of the three aspects of God-dess. Just as God-dess includes cosmic consciousness, and cosmic consciousness includes undifferentiated oneness, blissful

energy includes conscious energy, and conscious energy includes existential energy.

According to Rupa's aesthetic philosophy, only Radha's sensuous girlfriends enjoy the highest form of bliss known as the "sweet taste" and experience Radha-Krishna's confidential, loving pastimes. Indeed, the sweet taste constitutes the essence of Radha-Krishna.



Universalist Radha-Krishnaism offers a dynamic conception of reality. Since energies relate to God-goddess either externally or internally, God-goddess creates both material and spiritual experience. Spiritual energy manifests God-goddess' eternal play that displays unparalleled transcendent beauty, sublime spiritual life, bliss, ease, and grace of movement.

Those who know me as the 'principle of becoming' along with the 'principle of divinity' and the 'principle of sacrifice', even at the time of passing on—they know me, for their thought is absorbed in yoga.  
(BG 7.30)

Since all movement relates directly or indirectly to the integrating center, acknowledgment of the absolute's dynamic nature calls for a new view of life. It leads to a sublime understanding of reality that makes all experience meaningful.

God-dess is the one individual conceivable a priori—God-dess is individuated by, though not exhausted by, concepts alone. God-dess' scope of interaction is universal whereas any non-divine individual's area of interaction is localized. God-dess causally affects and is affected by every individual spirit; non-divine individual spirits causally affect and are affected by some, but not all, individuals. God-dess and individuals' quality of interaction also differ. For example, any non-divine individual's knowledge of others is imperfect and partial whereas God-dess' knowledge is without defect.

We affirm God-dess' goodness and deny the ancient ideas that matter is essentially evil. We also reject the traditional concept of matter lacking any activity or feeling. Because actual entities are dipolar, they all have a physical aspect, but none entirely lack psychic qualities, although usually these qualities are negligible. Thus, being physical does not negate having mind-like qualities.

The structure of reality is necessarily social. Hence, God-dess is necessarily related to non-divine actualities. Yet, God-dess does not require any particular universe to exist in a series of cosmic epochs in different universes with different laws of nature. God-dess presides over each universe as its eminent creative power, enabling all localized creative expressions, but no universe sustains God-dess' existence.

The world is God-dess' body. However, God-dess is not located in the universe, but the universe is located in God-dess because the divine being-in-becoming is all-inclusive. Panentheism—everything (*pan*, all) is in (*en*, in) God (*theos*, God). Panentheism is a mediating position between pantheism and classical theism. For pantheism, the world is identical to God; for classical theism, the world is completely external to God; for panentheism, the world is within God-dess.

Following modern biology, it is logical to see the spirit-body relationship as a one-to-many relation. The human body is a hierarchical society of thousands of kinds of cells. Thus, God-dess relates to the universe, every non-divine actual entity, and society like a person relates to the cells of his or her body. Individuals are enduring objects of a specific type. God-dess as an enduring object provides a basis for speaking of God-dess as a person.

A person's feelings cannot be completely separated from the feelings of cells in the body—damaging the cells hurts the person. Similarly, God-dess is affected by what affects individuals. God-dess knows each "cell" of the divine body in a perfectly distinct fashion unlike others who experience their cells en masse, like we see green grass but not each blade.

God-dess is not located within the universe like non-divine individuals. Nothing is external to God-dess. God-dess' only "environment" is

internal to God-dess. The lack of an external environment for God-dess eliminates threats to divine existence from such a source. The "harm" done to God-dess by creaturely suffering can never be fatal.

One objection to the idea of a deity whose "body" is the universe is that it implies that all values, both the good and the evil, are within God-dess, which is true, but not in a sense that compromises divine goodness. As a point of logic, wholes do not necessarily share the characteristics of their parts. God-dess is related to any non-divine creature as whole to part. Indeed, this is a basis of Radha-Krishna-ism's view that we are fragments of the divine, not the whole of it.

God-dess' goodness is not diminished if a fragmentary individual neglects the good of others through indifference or harmful intent. Yet, God-dess' goodness allows the suffering and wickedness of individuals to enter God-dess' experience. God-dess sympathizes with sufferers and grieves for lost opportunities to create good. Those who inflict suffering on others are punished by the laws of karma and/or the state.

God-dess feels the contrast between what could have been and what is. The "what is" is not solely determined by God-dess but is left, in part, to the individuals; God-dess and individuals co-create. Thus, there are tragic and sublime aspects of divine love.

### 3.2 Radha-Krishna, the Divine Couple

This *hladini* [pleasure potency] is Sri Radhika, who is the energy of the energetic, who possesses the topmost loving sentiments, and who is half of the Supreme Lord's form. She expands into the indescribable forms of Krishna's inconceivable happiness.

That Radha gives pleasure to Krishna. She is the embodiment of *mahabhava* [sublime ecstatic love]. There are eight varieties of emotions that nourish the *rasa* of *hladini*. They are known as Radha's eight *sakhis* [girlfriends].  
(KS 76)

Westerners traditionally view god as masculine. In India, a more balanced view exists. Some devotees see god as masculine like Krishna but with a female consort like Radha. Others see goddess as supreme with her masculine counterpart, like Durga with Shiva at her side.

Radha-Krishna, the Divine Couple, exist as one in two or two in one. Radha's devotees consider her better than Krishna because her love controls him. Krishna admits her superiority and incarnated in the same body with her as Chaitanya to experience her elevated enjoyment.

. . . I know that there is a certain *rasa* in me, and Radha, who charms me, con-

trols that *rasa*. I always long to taste that kind of pleasure which Radha gains from me. I made many attempts, but I could not taste it. And at a hint of the sweetness of that joy, the desire in my heart grows. So I have descended to taste that *rasa*, and I have tasted that *prema-rasa* in many ways.  
(CC 1.4.216-19)

It is not important whether Radha or Krishna is higher in an ontological sense. People's opinions of Radha or Krishna's importance are subjective. They exist as two aspects of one divine being without separate existence. Their *love* forms the highest manifestation of God-dess. Devotees partake in that love and help expand it in ever fresh ways to increase God-dess' enjoyment. They relate to Radha-Krishna as a whole. One without the other is meaningless and incomprehensible.

God-dess exists as male and female counterparts, Radha-Krishna, the Divine Couple, engaged in an eternal love affair with each other and all beings. Radha-Krishna hide their awesome, majestic nature and emphasize their sweet, loving nature, so devotees may relate as equals with them. God-dess responds to a devotee's love according to how the devotee approaches. The relationship involves give and take in both directions.

God-dess' infinite forms are like parts related to the whole. Since God-dess does not have internal difference, the parts are not like pieces of stone chipped off the whole. The part is the whole, all-knowing, all-pervading being. It is called a part, because the self energy of God-dess does not fully manifest in it. The whole is the whole because self energy fully manifests in it. It is like a hologram that when cut in pieces, each piece contains the whole picture, even though they vary in size and quality.

Following Rupa, Universalist Radha-Krishnaism's progressive aesthetic view uses the amount of sweet taste as a measure of spiritual rapture. Thus, undifferentiated oneness is considered the lowest manifestation of divine self energy and Radha-Krishna the highest manifestation.

Individuals cannot develop a relationship with an undifferentiated oneness because they are manifest and realize some spiritual potential. Since humans are capable of so much more, merging in an undifferentiated oneness means cessation of active potential. Such a state resembles dormancy.

Some like a stronger concept and talk about ceasing to exist. To them, existence is the source of suffering. However, people could not think about nonexistence if they did not exist. All ideas about nonexistence are drawn from existence, and people simply imagine what

nonexistence may look like. Existence forms the underlying basis for understanding. Therefore, existence is a wider concept than nonexistence. Nonexistence (as an opposite concept) cannot really take place because its foundation is existence.

An injured person resting in a deep coma may not be aware of anything, including the self, relatives surrounding the hospital bed, or the beautiful spring day in the park. Although alive, such a person remains unaware. To the conscious world, that person seems almost dead. Cessation of existence is like this. Individuals witness existence through consciousness. A serious injury may put a person in a coma, but after awakening, a new life of possibilities lies ahead. Spiritual death is impossible because existence denies it, but philosophically, it seems possible to cloud the consciousness and put it into deep slumber.

Emptiness and all things spring from fullness. Radha-Krishna are identical with Goddess, whose potential is fully realized. Between Radha-Krishna and undifferentiated oneness, an infinite hierarchy of partial manifestations exists. Each has a different form due to different combinations of majesty and sweetness manifest in them. Different forms do not imply difference in the identity of Goddess. Goddess' inherent nature includes all forms.

The innumerable manifestations of Goddess are all perfect, but they manifest different

degrees of perfection based on how many divine qualities they manifest fully or partially that people can perceive. Radha-Krishna remain the source of all manifestations, and all divine qualities fully manifest in them.

Radha-Krishna constitute supreme reality. They are both concrete and expansive. Their infinite nature encircles the whole universe, but that infinitude is centered in concrete form. Their being consists of an all-embracing, organic unity. Their concrete form does not limit or restrict their freedom because the modulations of their being pervade the infinite expanse of existence. They combine breadth of spirit, intense modulations, eternal peace, and calm perfection with dynamic, self-revealing, self-fulfilling creative activity, and quickness with intense harmony and grace. Radha-Krishna awaken these modulations in devotees, satisfying their longings for love, knowledge, and peace in an integrative synthesis. They develop freedom, flexibility, harmony, and everything needed for a rich spiritual life.

Since humans are finite parts of the holographic whole, God-dess lives within them. When devotees attune themselves to the spiritual plane, God-dess manifests within, and they consciously engage in a loving relationship--the perfection of spiritual life.

Radha-Krishna also live in Braj, the spiritual world. Like them, it consists of existence, consciousness, and bliss. As such, it differs

from the material world. Braj and Radha-Krishna remain inseparably related. Devotees cannot think of Radha-Krishna without Braj, nor Braj without Radha-Krishna. In their blissful forms, they eternally stay in Braj and metaphorically never leave it.

Just as there are infinite manifestations of Radha-Krishna, there are infinite manifestations of their world. For each manifestation of Radha-Krishna, there exists a corresponding manifestation of their world like a parallel universe. Braj represents an ultimate place to be, just as Radha-Krishna are the original forms of God-dess according to their devotees' understanding.

Radha-Krishna and their abode are highest because their sweetness eclipses their majesty. They do not appear as God-dess, or even sovereigns, but as young lovers, eternally engaged in amorous play with their beloved girlfriends on the riverbank in green groves laden with sweet smelling flowers creating a sweet enjoyable atmosphere.

The difference between the material and spiritual worlds is this: In the spiritual world everything is blissful and faultless, whereas in the material world everything is a temporary mixture of happiness and distress, full of impurities arising from time and place. Therefore the descriptions of the spiritual world are not imitations of those of the material

world, rather they are most coveted ideals. (KS 70)

Other forms of God-dess and their abodes constitute partial manifestations of this sweetest lushness. Devotees with perfect spiritual vision see Radha-Krishna's play everywhere, as well as in Braja, India and their hearts. People enter the spiritual Braj and Radha-Krishna's pastimes through natural devotion, the way of the heart. Devotion through regulative principles leads to more majestic, less sweetly innocent forms of God-dess. Graham Schweig explains:

Krishna is traditionally appreciated as the divinity who sends out a love call to all souls. His call is intended for those who relate to him in loving intimacy, not for those who regard him with reverential awe, worshipping primarily his attributes of cosmic power and majesty. . . .

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna's call to love, the expression of his divine longing, is a more hidden feature of the text, though it carries the Gita's most powerful message: the heart of God passionately desires to connect with the hearts of humans. (5-6)

Braja is a place of pilgrimage in Uttar Pradesh, India, but the spiritual Braj exists in devotees' hearts wherever they are. Radha-Krishna's pastimes go on there now and

forever. A person can see them only by the grace of Radha-Krishna or their beloveds.

The root foundation of this land is faith. The purport is that this land does not exist in argument or speculative knowledge; it exists in faith. (KS 95)

Eternal friends enrich God-dess' pastimes by participating in varied relationships in these spiritual realities. Some of them engage in these activities without beginning because in the spiritual world there is no beginning of time as experienced here. Others attain their roles through grace and devotional practice in the material world, but from the perspective of the spiritual world, they have always been there as eternal participants in Radha-Krishna's pastimes. An eternity in this world is less than a moment there. It can be described as anti-time. Thus, in a manner of speaking, people already live in the spiritual world and temporarily dream this world. It is as real as a person wants it to be.

Although time and space are found among the material elements, they nevertheless have their pure spiritual existence. . . . The soul's pure spiritual existence is properly situated in pure time and space. . . . in the spiritual body there is no difference between the body and its owner. . . . The ego, heart, mind and senses are nondifferent from

consciousness in the living entity's pure state. (KS 167-8)

God-dess is without needs, and all his-her acts are without motive or conscious effort. They arise from overflowing intrinsic bliss and manifest in the hearts, minds, and lives of devotees as divine play. God-dess fully exists within, along with everything else imaginable. There are different planes of existence, and consciousness pervades all. Devotional practices help attain the plane of consciousness where God-dess lives and enacts eternal pastimes with his-her dear friends.

Radha-Krishna embody the highest, most concentrated bliss known, which is different from ordinary happiness. Ordinary happiness is material, while bliss is spiritual. Ordinary happiness is transient and limited, while bliss is eternal and unlimited. Spiritual bliss is quantitatively and qualitatively vastly superior to everyday happiness. Transcendental bliss is unique and indescribable.

Radha-Krishna embody bliss and enjoyment as object enjoyed and enjoyer. They each play both roles in relation to the other. Their wonderful transcendental enjoyment absorbs the mind and senses. God-dess entails infinite variety and newness along with embodying all enjoyment.

Chaitanya's philosophy says God-dess' blissful energy increases a thousand-fold when implanted in the heart of a devotee. Devotees

develop passionate desire to serve God-dess according to their different moods of relating. The love of devotees aware of God-dess' power and majesty is enjoyable, but divine love remains shy before majesty. The more awareness of majesty, the less intense the spontaneous love.

Devotees who, unaware of God-dess' majesty, serve Radha-Krishna as a sweet, loving couple with ordinary human wants give them the highest enjoyment. Radha-Krishna enjoy such divine love most. This highest development of divine love occurs only when neither God-dess nor devotee is conscious of divinity.

Opulence decreases in proportion to the increase in sweetness, and sweetness decreases in proportion to the increase in opulence. The wonderful feature of sweetness in the Lord is exhibited by independence and equality between the devotee and the Lord. (KS 185)

Rupa was a learned playwright and poet, well versed in classical Indian aesthetics. He used the Tenth Book of the *Bhagavat* to expound Radha-Krishna's play, and he hierarchically enumerated the forms of God-dess, moods of devotion, devotional symptoms of love, forms of play, and means to enter that play. His brother, Sanatan, and nephew, Jiva, systematized those concepts.

They present a sublime concept of God-dess in which the most pleasure devotees can render Radha-Krishna is to be their friends and lovers, totally unaware of their divinity. Intense love remains the key element. Applying the principle as above so below, devotees understand that God-dess and the transcendental abode must resemble the most enjoyable aspects of human life.

The males and females of the material world are perverted reflections of the enjoyer and enjoyed of the spiritual world. If one searches through all dictionaries one will not find the words to properly describe the spiritual pastimes of the supremely conscious Lord and His associates. Hence the descriptions of the man and woman of the material world are used here as an appropriate indication. . . . We are able to describe the truths of Vaikuntha [the spiritual world] by describing mundane emotions as the reflections of spiritual emotions. There is no other alternative in this regard.  
(KS 106-7)

Radha-Krishna, Braj, the cow-herding pastimes, and other familiar elements form the Indian revelation of that ideal life. Radha-Krishnaism has spread throughout the world. Universalist Radha-Krishnaism divests it of cultural accretions and re-imagines it in a contemporary western context. The process

may take generations, and it will continue as long as the tradition is viable. God-dess and her-his play constantly expand in new ways; it is not a closed, fixed system.



An extremely intimate, loving relationship exists between God-dess and devotees. God-dess and devotees unite in love, but this does not imply a philosophically old-fashioned monistic union in which devotees completely lose their identity. Yet, absorbed in each other's love and lost in each other's thoughts there is scarcely room in their hearts for thought of anything else. God-dess and devotees become mutually subservient to each other. Devotees' pure divine love controls God-dess.

God-dess acts to make devotees happy, as is natural in love. God-dess loves devotees as much as they love him-her and always tries to reciprocate and love even more. God-dess manifests different forms to satisfy devotees' different tastes for enjoying devotion. God-dess loves devotees in the same manner in which they love. Visually speaking, he-she lives in the devotee's heart in the form a devotee meditates upon. She-he bestows divine love upon devotees from within and without. Devotees enjoy the bliss of closeness to God-dess and engage in loving play. Unlimited varieties of loving relationships with innumerable devotees gives God-dess supreme

enjoyment. Different religions contribute to God-dess' enjoyment by increasing varieties of loving relationships, but not all are equal and some are displeasing because they fail to exhibit love.

Love is by nature imperfect because it is never satisfied with itself. The more love a person possesses, the more they long for it. Divine love's dynamic nature causes it to grow and overreach itself. Since God-dess' love is limitless, his-her hunger for love is also limitless. To satisfy this limitless hunger, God-dess bestows devotion to attract more people to love and be loved by, which explains the underlying reason for creation.

God-dess experiences bliss by mercifully imparting devotion like a mother nursing her child. God-dess' mercy blesses the giver and receiver. Dynamic God-dess, though perfect in all respects, grows and changes by enjoying relationships. His-her every act of mercy is an act of self-transcendent bliss.

### 3.3 Krishna Chaitanya



Drawing of Krishna Chaitanya (center) and friends commissioned by king Pratap Rudra (prostrated in front) in Puri, Orisa.

Some people say that the Supreme Lord is omnipotent, therefore He may sometimes incarnate by His inconceivable energy in a material body, and all incarnations can therefore be accepted simply as historical incidents. According to the opinion of swanlike Vaishnavas, this statement is extremely unreasonable because it is impossible for Lord Krishna to accept a material body and perform material activities. Such action

would be insignificant and abominable for Him. But his appearance and pastimes in the hearts of the realized living entities' are accepted by both the sadhus [sages] and Krishna. . . .

Krishna's activities are not exactly historical like those of people under the clutches of *maya*, because Krishna's activities are not limited to any time or place. Nor are His activities comparable with the activities of ordinary people. (KS 90-91)

Krishna Chaitanya was born in Mayapur, Bengal, February 18, 1486. Chaitanya lived five hundred years ago. His contemporaries were Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Nicolaus Copernicus, and others who witnessed and ignited the Renaissance and rebirth of humanism in the western world. However, it was a much different time and culture in India than most Westerners can grasp. Yet his associates began writing about him in his lifetime, and inspired those who wrote his two most authoritative biographies. Therefore, his historicity and knowledge of his life is much more extensive than previous incarnations such as Krishna, Buddha, or Jesus.

We may consider Krishna a highly mythologized historical figure featured in the *Mahabharat*, written about two thousand years after the events it describes, with questionable historical value as we understand the term

today. Even the main Christian gospels, written forty to eighty years after Jesus' death, are historically questionable. However, since we have writings by Chaitanya's close followers as well as those they personally informed; they contain a higher level of historicity presented through a mythological or hagiographic lens.

From our human point of view, Radha-Krishna, in their intrinsic form, possess infinite potencies, infinite attributes, and all divine excellences. They constitute the ultimate source of everything. They possess indescribably beautiful spiritual bodies. They manifest in many places simultaneously, and no qualitative difference exists between these expansions and the original form.

They manifest in different forms with countless identities to experience unlimited pastimes. These expansions of God-dess live in their own spiritual worlds where they engage in eternal pastimes with their devotees. Different religions are based on experiences of God-dess' revelations according to time and circumstance. This accounts for different descriptions of God-dess who manifests to create and maintain the cosmos and impart spiritual wisdom. They are not subject to material energy. They operate in realms of consciousness and sometimes manifest on the material plane through highly evolved humans such as Jesus and Chaitanya.

Jesus was not an anomaly or alien in the universe and planetary life, but was the incarnation the Divine Logos and Wisdom, present in greater or lesser degrees in all human and planetary life. Jesus can be called the Christ, God's chosen one , because he reflects and embodies in his unique and historically-conditioned life what humans are called to become spiritually as God's beloved children, created in God's image. Accordingly, Jesus is both one of us and also something more than humankind as God's chosen revelation in our time and place.

For process theologians, the uniqueness of Christ cannot, of course, exclude God's presence in other cultures and religious traditions. If the world lives by God's incarnation, then other cultural and faith communities will experience and describe the presence of God's vision in their own unique and life-transforming ways. (PT 65)

The archetypal forms of God-dess live in cosmic consciousness and appear in human consciousness to communicate. Since humans are parts of cosmic consciousness, sometimes Radha-Krishna possess a person and appear in human form through that person. His devotees consider Chaitanya the incarnation of Radha-Krishna who appeared in the guise of a

devotee to teach the religion of divine love. Sometimes he experienced the mood of a human devotee. Other times, he was completely possessed by God-dess. He manifested the moods of Radha-Krishna as well as other divine forms.

Fully in touch with God, Jesus was, in his own time, an energetic field of force whose presence could transform minds, bodies, spirits, and relationships. (PT 71)

The same can be said of Chaitanya. There is nothing to prevent God-dess from manifesting more fully in certain people and places than others. Many learned devotees and scholars see the sixteenth century Bengali saint and mystic, even in his own lifetime, as an incarnation of Radha-Krishna in one body manifesting the archetype of spiritual androgyny. This belief continues today among his devoted followers all over the world.

Chaitanya gave a more developed revelation than the ancient Vedas and previous understandings derived from them over millennia. In the Vedic age, people developed a relationship with God-dess in the mood of neutrality. Over the ages, the relational moods of servanthood, friendship, and parental affection developed.

The life and teachings of Krishna Chaitanya, who incarnated God-dess' amorous divine love, forms the basis of Universalist Radha-Krishnaism. Its conclusions are based on his

teachings as developed by his followers. Indeed, Chaitanyaism and process theology form a fabulous combination.



While learned and literate, Chaitanya left no writings. His disciples, to whom he imparted his direct realizations of spiritual truth in summary form, systematically expanded them. Chaitanya lived an exemplary life for the time and place he lived showing how to relate to Radha-Krishna. He chose to be a renunciate because in India then, it was the only way he could be respected and get close to people of all castes since renunciates were considered outside normative social orders. He sent Nityanand back to Bengal to marry and show renunciation is not necessary. We come in the disciplic line from Nityanand's *shakti* Jahnava Thakurani.

The Lord said to Nityananda Prabhu, "O exalted one, dear Nityananda, please listen. You must return to Navadvipa immediately. In my own words, I have promised, "I will drown every ignorant, wretched and fallen soul in the deluge of *krishna-prema*. However, if you also take to the reclusive life and discard Your indomitable enthusiasm to propagate the chanting of the Holy Name, then who will deliver these fallen souls? You are the storehouse of devotional mellows,

distributing divine love to everyone. . . ." (CB 689)

Chaitanya opened the floodgates of the amorous relationship that is topmost because it contains elements of the other relationships along with even sweeter tastes. Chaitanya's follower, Rupa Goswami explained these five moods of relating to God-ness based on his developed understanding of classical, Indian aesthetic theory. After summarizing all the relationships, Rupa focused on the amorous relationship, as do his followers.

Chaitanya revealed the divine through words and deeds. The life of Chaitanya constitutes an important event, whose repeated remembrance strengthens its field of force, allowing him to live in his followers like Epperly explains about Jesus:

Process theologians see Jesus as a reflection of God's aim toward creative transformation, calling humankind forward from what is to what can become. Christ calls us to be open to God now and in the future. While God's aim at creative transformation is present in all things, seeking beauty, intensity, and community, God is specifically present in Jesus Christ in ways that create a life-transforming field of force among all those who hear his message. The interplay of divine-human call and response resonates in all things, but

Jesus Christ's life and mission creates an intensified field of force that transformed persons in the first century and still transforms persons today. (PT 70)

Chaitanya was human like us, as well as an incarnation of Radha-Krishna. One does not deny the other. It reinforces his role as a paradigmatic individual since people cannot follow a nonhuman who looks and behaves completely foreign to them. As Chaitanya, God-dess personally shows by example how to practice devotion. Devotees enhance Chaitanya's transformative effect by accepting him as God-dess' revelation. They also enhance it by deliberately experiencing his presence and studying his teachings. In this way, they allow him to shape them.

Chaitanya's followers amplify his field of force by spreading the memory of his life and teachings to ever new generations in all parts of the world. This keeps his presence alive today as it passes from one devotee to another. Thus, he touches and transforms lives today.

God-dess manifests both immanent and transcendent aspects. God-dess as divine love incarnate in Chaitanya remains non-different from Radha-Krishna in the transcendental realm. Both embody equal aspects of deity.

### **3.4 Simultaneous Oneness and Difference**

Philosophical thought regarding the relation between God-dess and humans follows two main lines. Some emphasize basic distinction between infinite and finite and believe in the absolute transcendence of one over the other. Others emphasize identity between them and believe in God-dess' immanent presence in the human spirit.

Both lines of thought contain strengths and weaknesses. People need both for an adequate, full explanation of the situation. God-dess reconciles beliefs of identity and difference in a higher synthesis outlined by Chaitanya and developed by Jiva Goswami.

Like quantum theory, simultaneous oneness and difference encourages a high tolerance for ambiguity. Rather than either/or, it offers both/and that provides ample room for differing interpretations. Chaitanyaism remains a diverse heterodoxy despite efforts of fundamentalists to establish an orthodoxy. Nevertheless, ambiguity is central to the spiritual quest for that which seems unknowable in our present state of existence.

Transcendence and immanence exist as associated aspects of an inherent unity in God-dess. Symbolic language is used to help comprehend God-dess' omnipresence. God-dess exists beyond the sensory world as the

blissful, personal absolute. God-dess simultaneously pervades the universe in a hidden form in which all exists. He-she supports all, yet exists beyond all as the source of everything.

God-dess remains simultaneously different from the world and identical with it. God-dess creates the world from him-herself and remains separate. Identity and difference paradoxically exist simultaneously.

Simultaneous oneness and difference pertains to God-dess, individuals, and nature, as well as to all energies and their possessor. God-dess appears in many forms but remains one. God-dess' play, names, and forms are simultaneously different and non-different. Even the parts of God-dess' body are one and different. Each part can carry out the functions of other parts and of the whole. The part is identical with the whole, but still a part, thus different from the whole.

God-dess' form remains inconceivable because it is infinite and immeasurable. The Vedic scriptures describe God-dess:

as "the greatest of the great" and "the smallest of the small," as "one who moves and yet moves not," as "one who is far as well as near, immanent as well as transcendent," and as one who does not have the mind or sense organs like ours and yet performs all the functions of these. (Kapoor 156)

God-dess paradoxically unites the opposite ideas of difference and non-difference that leads to a fuller unity and ability to perfectly encompass all extremes of experience. God-dess' potency reconciles transcendence with immanence and maintains her-his fullness in relation to the material world by reconciling real difference with real identity.

## 4. Individual Spirits

Never, truly, have I ever not existed—nor you, nor these kings who protect the people, and never shall any of us ever cease to be, now or forevermore.

(BG 2.12)

Individual spirits are God-dess' differentiated partial manifestations. According to Chaitanyaism, they are marginal energy, distinct from spiritual and material energies but connected with both, just as the shore remains distinct from land and sea but connected to both. Individuals are influenced by spiritual and material energies like the shore may be part of land or sea depending on the tides. Though they remain free to experience spiritual or material energy, their intrinsic nature entails enjoying a loving relationship with God-dess inspired by spiritual energy.

That illustrative description presents a complex metaphysical idea of the nature of individual spirits in Chaitanyaism. Today, different analogies may expand the meaning and shed more light on this complex subject matter. Spiritual energy is polyvalent and the source of everything. In the jargon of modern science, it is the underlying structure of existence and the field of infinite possibilities. To a modern observer, it may appear as both indestructible and destructible, and it may

appear both as infinite and infinitesimal. Accordingly, people call it spiritual or material energy, or God-dess and individual spirit—depending on the observer’s perspective. However, it remains the same existence.

Individuals constitute a distinct metaphysical reality although simultaneously one with God-dess. Knowledge, action, and enjoyment are their attributes. They are self-luminous and reveal themselves along with objects that come within their focus of consciousness. The spirit’s luminosity derives from cosmic consciousness, who alone possesses real self-luminosity.

The spirit is infinitesimal, yet it pervades the physical body that temporarily encases it, like a minute sun whose conscious light pervades the whole body and beyond. It is nonmaterial, therefore, not limited by spacetime, but in this conditioned state, it believes it is. It exists as a discrete being with a field of consciousness and makes dimensional shifts in consciousness.

Krishna is like the spiritual sun, and the living entities are like the atomic particles of that incomparable sun’s rays.

Therefore all the qualities of Krishna are naturally present in the living entities.

(KS 77)

It is the subject of ego-consciousness, but its ego should not be identified with the empirical ego produced by material nature and its modifications—the body and senses. As a

product of material nature, the empirical ego is impermanent, impure, and likely to suffer. True ego that remains unaffected by the abrasiveness of material nature is eternal, of one substance, identical with itself, spiritual, blissful, cognizant, and eternally pure. Birth, death, development, and decay refer to the body encasing the individual spirit under illusion's influence, not its intrinsic nature that remains eternally unchanged. Conscious bliss exists explicitly in individuals under spiritual energy but implicitly for those under the cloak of material energy.

The numberless individuals' intrinsic nature never changes except it eternally undergoes the process of spiritual unfolding. Differences exist among individuals according to past and present deeds, desires, and positions. Devotees of God-dess feel happy since they are free of self-centeredness and realize they possess the greatest treasure, love of God-dess.

Just as the embodied while in this body passes through childhood, youth, and old age, so also the embodied attains another body—the wise person is not bewildered by this. (BG 2.13)

Individuals' innate function is to love God-dess, but philosophically speaking, they possess free choice in everything. So in this regard too, they are free to please God-dess by submitting to manifestations of spiritual energy or to experience the manifestations of

elusive material nature. Thus, Chaitanyaism makes a distinction between these two types of individuals.

Those on the material plane, undergo a process of conscious evolution as God-dess persuasively tries to inform and attract them while they enjoy worldly things that are made for enjoyment. So in reality, asceticism serves no useful purpose. The goal is to endlessly enjoy God-dess' enchanting company. When people awaken, they see God-dess in everything, serve him-her accordingly, and enjoy a higher level of bliss.

Individuals bound in material perspectives forget their real nature as spiritual friends of God-dess. Symbolically, they are covered by subtle and gross bodies that they identify with. The subtle body consists of mind, intelligence, consciousness, and egoism that nature conditions in bound individuals. It exists in its pure form in individuals' spiritual nature. When a physical body also covers the spirit, its material consciousness intensifies as it begins the cycle of repeated birth and death.

Certain impulses and desires lead to means of satisfaction, but often they are out of reach because in the material condition the totality of existence in its intricate details cannot be fully experienced. According to their actions, spirits experience a wide range of births in heavenly, hellish, or middling conditions. In these lives, due to nature's dualistic face, they unavoidably

experience physical and mental pain along with enjoyment.

God plays no favorites, but seeks abundant life for all creatures. The universality of God's initial aim, or vision of possibilities for each creature, reflects God's delight in all creation and God's love for each creature. No one is left behind or forgotten in a world in which God patiently seeks the salvation of all things. (PT 49)

Since individuals remain part of God-dess' spiritual nature, they intrinsically seek to experience complete eternal happiness. As a result of grace, conscious positive efforts, and a bit of luck a person gains the company of an advanced devotee who imparts right knowledge and inspires them into the way of natural devotion. Then they turn from the world of duality, find God-dess, and become established in eternal, blissful nature. God-dess' appearance dissipates mistaken identity. As the rising sun dissipates darkness before it becomes visible, the preliminary stages of devotion relieve people of false material conceptions. Their life culminates in blissful realization of God-dess.

In their natural state, individual spirits experience themselves as part of God-dess and spontaneously love God-dess. Attaining this state implies attaining God-dess, bliss, removal of false identification and binding actions,

cessation of pain and suffering, and entering a state where spirits do not experience dualistic existence after death.

Individuals may attain liberation while still living in the physical body or after death as a side effect of loving devotion. Devotion is the real goal. It includes complete transmutation of the material plane and elimination of all extraneous factors blocking individuals' inherent capacity to realize bliss.

Alluring natural devotion makes intimacy with God-dess possible. Natural devotion includes loving God-dess and being loved by her-him in return. To fully realize God-dess, people must realize God-dess as the subject and object of love in his-her sweetest aspect—Radha-Krishna.

God-dess loves devotees just as devotees love him-her, but both parties want to experience even more. They are each other's heart and soul, and their minds are absorbed in each other. Divine love does not serve merely as a means to liberation--it is the end in itself. It is the garden of highest bliss, to which the gateway of liberation naturally opens.

It is beyond my power of speech to describe the pure ecstatic pastimes of the living entities, because the words I would use in such descriptions are products of the material world. (KS 71)

## 5. World of Experience

### 5.1 The Beginning

Creation of the material universe begins the spacetime continuum. Before creation, there was no space or time. Without beginning or end, God-dess exists in the eternal now. The logos Om manifests in the big bang. The event horizon bursts from the primal singularity. The one becomes many. On this level of reality, spacetime begins.

No one can adequately explain the beginning of creation or what existed before it. No one was there--not scientists or religionists. Both speculate. Yet people want to know how creation began. Where does this universe come from? Science and religion try their best to explain the unexplainable and give people something to hold on to.

Humans want to know where they came from and their purpose in life. Religions tried answering these questions for millennia, according to the needs of particular people resulting in diverse religious interpretations of creation. These mythological interpretations are based on scientific understandings of the day.

To teach such mythological stories as historic, scientific fact equal to scientific

cosmology of the twenty-first century is absurd, just like twenty-first century cosmology will seem absurd in the thirty-first century. While myths contain spiritual truths, they are not objective facts. The ancients wrote these stories with completely different goals than modern thinkers. They were not concerned with facts as much as addressing the spiritual meaning of creation. Their mythological explanations are true from a spiritual, ontological perspective although they are not objectively factual.

Scientific explanations of the universe like big bang theories may constitute somewhat reasonable scientific models and explanations of how creation came about. Yet no consensus exists among the scientific community. They also create a myth that appeals to the modern imagination. Some scientists enter the realm of metaphysics in their speculations about innumerable universes existing in a multiverse. Some atheist scientists use this idea in a desperate attempt to answer the anthropic principle without resort to a divine creator-designer.

Both scientific and mythological explanations can be true simultaneously. They deal with creation on different levels of understanding. One is taught in science classes, and one in religion classes. Trouble comes when religion seeks to place ancient science on an equal footing with contemporary science and when science oversteps its bounds by discussing god

and other metaphysical topics—thus becoming Scientism, which has its own dogma, unfounded beliefs, and manipulation.

While science and religion remain separate fields, their cross pollination can produce wonderful results. Religious interpretation adds meaning to science, and science grounds religion in twenty-first century cosmology. They complement each other and can peacefully coexist. When both views are held simultaneously a fuller understanding of multidimensional reality develops through an interpretive shift and the will to do so.

God-dess exists as the ground of becoming, the primal cause, the beginning and end of all, the source of life and love. God-dess exists before and after spacetime. God-dess was, is, and ever shall be. The universe springs from his-her eternal, infinite spiritual potential.

This is the cosmic womb for beings, for all of them—try to understand this. I am, of the entire universe, the coming forth into being as well as the going forth into cosmic absorption. (BG 7.6)

The material universe exists as a reflection of the spiritual world, like a tree reflected on water. The tree is real; the reflection is ephemeral, yet based in reality. The material universe exists as a temporary modification of the spiritual world. (Plato's theory of forms is a similar concept.) It appears real like the dream world sleepers inhabit seems real, but they wake up

and realize its temporary nature. People consider the waking world real, but it forms another level of dream. However, it shares many features of the real spiritual world.

The Beloved Lord said: With its roots upward and its branches downward, they speak of the everlasting Ashwattha tree, Extending downward and upward, its branches are nourished by the 'qualities' [of nature] with its fresh shoots as the objects of the senses. Also stretched downward are its roots, promoting action in the world of humans. (BG 15.1a,2)

Many people long to be somewhere else. They sense that things are not quite right here, that a place exists somewhere far beyond, where everything is right—a place where the ills and suffering of this world do not exist, where human longings must exist in their true expression. They long to be home—where the spirit finds rest.

People can experience conscious dreaming. They dream and experience all kinds of things, but on some level, they know they are asleep in bed. They engage in activities impossible while awake and can be on the brink of death then wake up home, safe in bed.

Likewise, practitioners live this life knowing its dreamlike nature. They know no matter what happens in the dream, they will be all

right. They develop distance and detachment from dream experiences while engaging in them enthusiastically enjoying every moment. They experience awake dreaming and know this existence is a dream. The spirit cannot be harmed in any way, and when the time is right, it will awaken in its spiritual home where everything is eternally full of knowledge and bliss. Devotees learn to switch their attention back and forth between the two planes of consciousness and live in both.

Everything is ultimately spiritual. Because people see things as separate from God-dess, they call them material. When they realize God-dess and God-dess' energy form all existence, they perceive the true nature of things and become awake dreamers who know reality.

God-dess remains incredibly close and immanent. When people talk to God-dess, God-dess hears, as well as knows, feels, and experiences their lives. God-dess talks to them and guides them on the path of life. God-dess remains a constant presence with all beings, who may freely acknowledge God-dess' presence and follow God-dess' guidance or otherwise.

The Upanishads describe the relationship between cosmic consciousness and individual souls as two birds sitting on a tree. One bird tries to guide the other on the best way of life. The other bird busily eats the fruits of the tree and pays no attention. Yet, the first bird always

waits for its friend to turn for guidance and inspiration.

## **5.2 Living in the Material World**

Individual spirits are parts of God-dess, one in quality, different in quantity. Due to their infinitesimal size, when they are born in the material world, they come under the spell of its illusion. Remembrance of their spiritual nature is covered and forgotten. They develop a false ego that identifies with their body, conditioned mind, family, society, nation, and possessions.

The self is profoundly complex and relational and intimately connected with its physical and communal environment. Mind, body, and spirit flow into one another in the ongoing dance of creative transformation. Spirituality is profoundly relational and embodied, and embodiment can be, conversely, a source of revelation and inspiration for spiritual transformation. (PT 83-4)

Humans possess a more highly developed consciousness than plants and animals. They can be cognizant of both spiritual and physical nature, which scientists still struggle to understand. Humans enjoy more exercise of free will and realization of spiritual nature than less developed life forms.

Process thought advocates a re-enchantment of nature, in which experience, feeling, value, and beauty are understood to be inherent in the nature of things, and not merely the result of our human categories of experience (Immanuel Kant) or relationship with, or use, of non-human realities (Martin Heidegger). Humankind is not the experiential center of the universe nor is human kind alone in a mechanistic and meaningless world, as existentialists suggest; rather, humans are part of a multi-leveled experiential universe, throbbing with emotion and creativity. (PT 23)

Human life is ideal to observe, question, share insights, and record them for the benefit of future generations. Spirits may reincarnate as humans for many lifetimes, until they attain full realization and go to God-dess. Earth is a middle planet somewhere between heaven and hell. Parts of earth are heavenly and others are hellish, and it seems both are often mixed together in varying proportions. Conditions on earth are often good for the spiritual quest because many people satisfy material necessities without spending all their time doing so, yet unavoidable suffering makes them want something more.

Despite the significant influence of the environment and our past history, we are

artists of our own experience, whether or not we are aware of it, shaping our experience in terms of our conscious or unconscious aims and values. The reality of self-creation is an important theological point. . . . God has *not* planned the most important details of your life in advance without your input, nor does God want you to fulfill a purpose determined in eternity. (PT 27)

Since the future depends on the choices everyone makes, the outcome remains unknown. Finally, no matter what, all face death and the perishing nature of things in the temporal world. People long for eternal life because that is their nature. When the body dies, the spirit continues on to the next life taking the subtle body with it. There it experiences its individuality in a new form.

However, endlessly experiencing mixed happiness and distress does not ultimately satisfy the spirit. Therefore, advanced spirits seek release from the cycle of repeated birth and death. Some settle for ending awareness of individual existence, which they equate with suffering, by merging into the undifferentiated aspect of God-dess. Others strive to purify the spirit of mundane trappings and enter a personal relationship with God-dess that constitutes the true nature of the self and leads to eternal enjoyment.

On hellish planets or in hellish parts of this planet, people suffer and struggle just to exist, and therefore, they possess little energy for true self realization. On heavenly planets and in heavenly parts of this planet, people may be too busy overindulging in pleasures to spend much energy seeking enlightenment, even though attainment of such a life usually implies a more developed consciousness capable of enjoying the subtleties of life.

Karma, the law of cause and effect, determines whether spirits wind up in heaven, hell, or somewhere in between. We create our own destiny. Everything we did in previous lives and this life brings us to the present situation. Everything we do in this life carries us on to the next life by momentum. This world is an expression of desire, and the next world is too.

When people die, it is said, their life flashes before them. Witnessing their own life in one brief glance, they become their own observers and judges. Actions and experiences in this life carry spirits to the next life. If wind blows over a garbage dump, it picks up a foul odor. If it blows over a rose garden, it picks up a sweet odor. Likewise, experiences of this life carry over into the next and help determine the course it will take.

When one acquires a body and also, when one departs from it, its master [the self], carrying these [senses] moves on,

as the wind carries scents from their source. (BG 15.8)

It is difficult to break the cycle of birth and death, but by the grace of God-dess, it is possible. God-dess freely bestows grace to all. However, some people are more open to grace than others. The best way to open to grace is to become a devotee of God-dess and be open to sharing love.

Place your mind on me alone; let your discernment enter into me. You shall dwell only in me from now forevermore—of this there is no doubt. (BG 12.8)

Devotees engage in the eternal religion of loving God-dess in the midst of this material manifestation. Thus, their lives become spiritual. Separation from God-dess differentiates matter from spirit, as darkness is separation from light. When devotees engage in loving service of God-dess, their lives are spiritual.

We live in a pan-revelational world in which God's Spirit is not an external force, but an internal reality, present in each moment's birth and throughout our life's journey. . . . The universal God is also the personal Spirit, moving in the lives of individuals and communities. . . . The Spirit is God's energy and inspiration within us. It inspires our personal responses to God's invitations . . . The Spirit includes and connects everyone

and all things, . . . It is the breath of life that inspires us and radiates throughout the whole universe. (PT 80)

Practitioners need not withdraw from the world. Everything can be used in God-dess' service and made spiritual by developing a devotional attitude and vision. As long as individuals remain embodied, they may enjoy what this life offers, while maintaining an attitude of clever detachment. God-dess put spirits here with abundant opportunities for enjoyment, and they should enjoy them fully. Devotees can have holistic material and spiritual happiness. The more spiritual they become, the more they enjoy life fully. If spiritual life consists of eternal bliss, why not enjoy this life and experience what bliss is all about?

. . . eternal life is a present reality as well as a future hope. If God is omnipresent, then "heaven" and "earth" both reflect God's aim at wholeness and beauty. God is working our lives inspiring us as persons and communities to seek abundant life for all creation in the here and now, as well as in the afterlife. Though we can turn away from God's vision for our lives, God continues to lure us toward wholeness and beauty for ourselves and others. (PT 138)

### **5.3 Science and Religion**

Christian experience and doctrine are open-ended and constantly growing in relationship to the world. Faithfulness to Christ inspires us to embrace and promote creative transformation and explore new visions of God and human life as a result of the encounter with scientific discoveries in physics, genetics, and biology. The dynamic synergy of faith and science provides new opportunities for understanding ourselves and the universe within which we live, move, and have our being. (PT 92)

Universalist Radha-Krishnaism accepts a contemporary, scientific view of the world. Big bang theories and quantum physics are acceptable in its world view. The holographic paradigm developed by physicist David Bohm and neurophysiologist Karl Pribram suggests this world exists as a multidimensional holographic projection of the spiritual world. Practitioners leave deciphering the mysteries of the physical manifestation to scientists. They stay informed of scientific views but focus on spiritual matters.

In this postmodern age of cosmology and the human genome, a richly satisfying harmony between scientific and spiritual worldviews is attainable. According to process

theology, the cosmos, knowledge of God-dess, and even God-dess evolve.

Understanding cosmic origins characterizes religions throughout history. Religion springs from the insights of inspired individuals and tries to make sense of life. Ancient seers used the knowledge of the day to describe the nature of the cosmos. Such descriptions of origins generally fall under the heading of myth. These myths tend to show a God-dess imposed order that eliminates the sense of chaos. They assure people they are not alone but connected to a loving, beneficent God-dess who insures things work out well in the end.

Scientists constantly delve into new areas—observing nature, investigating the phenomenal world in innovative ways, digging deeper into areas where understanding remains incomplete. Universalist Radha-Krishnaism approaches the spiritual quest with a scientific attitude of discovery. It does not settle for past truths but ever seeks new truth to expand human understanding. In an ever-changing world, people need ever fresh ways to approach God-dess.

Human understanding of the origin of the universe fundamentally changed in the last seventy-five years. Spiritual seekers benefit by understanding cosmology, creation, and origins based on facts known today, rather than following outdated ideas from thousands of years ago. People know things their predecess-

ors did not. Big bang theories include profound consequences for theology. According to Whitehead:

Philosophy frees itself from the taint of ineffectiveness by its close relations with religion and with science, natural and sociological. It attains its chief importance by fusing the two, namely, religion and science, into one rational scheme of thought . . . . Religion is the translation of general ideas into particular thoughts, particular emotions, and particular purposes; it is directed to the end of stretching individual interest beyond its self-defeating particularity. Philosophy finds religion and modifies it; and conversely religion is among the data of experience which philosophy must weave into its own scheme. (PT 20)

However, science has its limits. This is where spirituality steps in and helps. Science cannot say what caused the big bang, what happened before it, or what exists outside this universe—although speculation on these subjects abounds. The working assumptions of science are no more or less secure than the working assumptions of religion. A modest skepticism about the abilities of science is arguably in the spirit of science itself. We offer an alternative to scientism's scientific materialist worldview.

Science does not negate God-dess' existence pervading and sustaining creation as well as transcending it. Every day, fresh scientific insights confirm the wholeness, interconnectedness, and amazing complexity of creation and its elements.

The big bang for instance calls for a divine explanation since the material manifestation had a clear beginning. The universe could not create itself. A spiritual force outside spacetime created it or transformed itself into the universe. That spiritual force is God-dess.

The anthropic principle, the scientific notion that the universe is planned and finely tuned to develop (human) life, supports the idea that humans are created in the image of God-dess to establish a loving relationship. Symbolically, the universe is God-dess' play.

Scientific formulas alone cannot answer all questions about the origin of the universe. Belief in a creator God-dess and scientific discoveries can be harmonized. Belief in God-dess answers some questions about what came before the big bang and why the universe appears so well tuned for human existence as well as current science does.

God-dess created the universe and the laws governing it and gave humans the intellectual ability to understand its workings. Why disregard those abilities? Is God-dess threatened by discoveries about creation? The schism between science and spirituality is artificial and in

today's world, even absurd. People benefit by using their God-dess given gifts to understand nature along with advancing consciousness and general well-being.

God-dess exists inside nature as well as outside nature. Scientific efforts cannot prove or disprove God-dess' existence. Similar to religious fanaticism, atheism must be a form of blind faith, since it adopts beliefs it cannot defend with pure reason. God-dess' existence cannot be proven by religion either. It ultimately comes down to faith and understanding.

Science cannot discount the great world religions that are based on millennia of history, moral philosophy, and the strong evidence human altruism provides. If scientists can humbly admit the limits of their scope, religionists should humbly admit the limits of their beliefs too.

Throughout history, scriptures revealed the nature of God-dess to humans within the limits of their reason and vocabulary. Would it have served God-dess' purpose thousands of years ago to talk about radioactive decay, geologic strata, and DNA?

Faith in a loving God-dess cannot be built on a foundation of untruths about nature. Scriptural authors wrote to the best of their knowledge and ability at the time. If discrepancies are found in their words, scientific and philosophical methods can be employed to understand why such things occurred. This

deepens modern insight. If fundamentalists persist in presenting old stories as scientific truth in the face of new evidence to the contrary to preserve the authority of scripture, they do a disservice to scripture, science, and truth. This hurts religion more than science.

DNA evidence of the relatedness of all living things is awesome. It is the master plan of the same God-dess who created the universe and made its physical properties just right to create galaxies, stars, planets, heavy elements, and life. Generally referred to as theistic evolution, Universalist Radha-Krishnaism calls it panentheistic evolution. Scientist-theologian Huston Smith explains this as follows:

And so long as we can form no idea of the way a material system may become a conscious, responsible person, it is an empty pretense to suggest that we have an explanation for the descent of man. Darwinism has diverted attention for a century from the descent of man by investigating the *conditions* of evolution and overlooking its *action*. Evolution can be understood only as a feat of emergence. (127)

The nonanthropomorphic counterpart of special creation is emanation. In the celestial realm the species are never absent; their essential forms or archetypes reside there from an endless beginning. As earth ripens to receive

them, each in its turn drops to the terrestrial plane and donning the world's fabric, gives rise to a new life form. The origin of species is metaphysical. (139)

Religion answers questions traditional science never intended to address, such as: How did the universe get here? What is the meaning of life? What happens after death? Devotees understand the limits of both science and religion and do not confuse their different worldviews and spheres of expertise. People need them both to live balanced lives fully conscious of themselves and their environment.

Recognizing that there is only one world, faith and science seek to discern the nature of reality as they grow alongside and in relationship to one another. A truly living faith evolves, embraces, and interprets the scientific adventure, congruent with its vision of creative wisdom moving through the universe. (PT 94)

God-dess, who created the universe and communes with people through prayer, selfless love, and spiritual insight, would not expect them to deny the obvious truths science reveals to prove their love. Yet, many followers of fundamentalist sects are asked to do just that and instead believe the unbelievable. People need a rational approach to spirituality now.

## 5.4 Time and Free Will

I am time of all that moves forward in time. (BG 10.30a)

We accept a view of time in which: The past is past and cannot be repeated or visited—it no longer exists objectively. The future remains open and exists only as possibilities not actualities. The present happens now and is all that actually exists—the eternal now. The past influences present and future, but we are free to experience paradigm shifts and break with the past. The future is not predetermined, and we have free will to act within the constraints of the situation.

Many options exist for possible future realities since people experience some freedom in choosing their future as well as how they view the past and allow it to influence them. Each instant offers a new and unrepeatable eternal now. Therefore, devotees experience eternal life related to God-dess now.

Temporality brings new experiences to God and to the creaturely world. Accordingly, the future is not predetermined but open and surprising for us and also for God. A living God experiences new things and does new things. Present as the inspiration of every emerging moment of experience, God is the source of novelty, (PT 21)

Present experience includes a select portion of the past. Individual and collective experiences led us to this particular present. In the same way, the present becomes past and leads to a new future. People influence the future by how they live in the present, the consciousness they develop, and most importantly, the loving relationship they develop with Radha-Krishna. Devotees envision their desired future and enlist the aid of God-dess to get them there by living in the presence of God-dess constantly.

Having come to this impermanent unhappy world, offer your love to me.

Be mindful of me with love offered to me; sacrificing for me, act out of reverence for me. Surely you shall come to me, thus having absorbed your self in yoga with me as the supreme goal.  
(BG 33b-34)

God-dess wills the good for all beings. However, God-dess uses the power of sweet persuasion rather than coercive control to bring this about. He-she does not micromanage the world but permeates and supports it. God-dess tries to persuade people to follow the divine plan, participate in cosmic play, and enhance the joy of life. Individuals possess free will to accept or reject God-dess' plan for salvation, and thus, the possibility of perceived evil exists. God-dess wants to engage in voluntary, loving relationships with people who

possess free will—not with automatons programmed to do what is prescribed.

All living entities have independence that was awarded by the Lord, yet those who desire auspiciousness naturally remain under the subordination of Krishna.

(KS 78)

Since God-dess uses persuasion rather than control, it behooves people to use persuasion rather than control in interpersonal and international relations. The *Mahabharat* provides the example of Krishna trying to mediate a peaceful settlement between the Pandavas and Kauravas regarding who rules the empire.

The Kauravas unjustly usurped the empire from the Pandavas and rule as oppressive tyrants. Krishna, a friend of his devotees the Pandavas, reasons with the Kauravas to reach an accommodation so the five Pandavas may rule five small villages and thus make a living. The Kauravas will not give an inch, so war is the only alternative. Justice and ending suffering sometimes require military, coercive control, but only after exhausting all peaceful means, and even then reluctantly. This provides a useful model for today's international arena where coercive control is often the first option rather than the last.

On a personal level, everyone benefits by advocating universal peace and justice. People attain the best results using persuasion rather

than coercion in interpersonal relationships too. Loving relationships naturally exclude control, domination, and violence. God-dess considers everyone dear and showers grace on all equally. Some remain more open to grace, and therefore, appear more favored.

God persistently seeks to promote beauty and complexity amid the realities of pain and suffering, even though God cannot compel creatures or the planet as a whole to embody God's particular visions, but must work with the world as it is in terms of God's vision of what the world can become. (PT 100)

Just because someone receives grace does not mean their life will be easy, happy, or peaceful. Devotees often suffer greatly, as the Pandavas did (as further described in the *Mahabharat*). Yet they remain fixed in eternal, spiritual relation with God-dess. Krishna did not sanction the Kauravas' corrupt rule. While outwardly not taking sides, Krishna worked through his devotees to reestablish their just rule.

God-dess' coercive power is the laws of nature that result from a divine decision no individual can overturn. This divine power, a form of efficient causation that provides an ordered world no individual decided, is a necessary condition for individual activity. God-dess sets the basic outlines of individuals'

actions and the limits within which freedom operates.

God has a vision, but not a specific and unalterable agenda for the adventures of cosmic, planetary, and human evolution. Divine Creativity delights in the dance of creation, initiating steps and then responding to creation with further steps in the evolution of the universe, part and whole. (PT 96)

Time is the process of creation. The universe is not a totality, fixed forever, but a dynamic vector growing from a determinate past into an open (partly indeterminate) future. God-dess relates to the world through feelings.

If divine knowing is perfect, it follows that God-dess knows the past as fully determinate (created), the present as the process of determination (being created), and the future as partly indeterminate (yet to be created). The question is not whether God-dess knows a fully determinate future, but is there a fully determinate future to know? The nature of time is the issue. If the future exists as partially indeterminate, unsettled, or uncreated, then a perfect knower must know it as such. Epperly says,

. . . the vision of the ultimate future of human and planetary life, is open-ended. Following Whitehead, process theologians do not envisage any predetermined terminus point for planetary

history. God seeks beauty in our lives, in the human community, and in planetary life; but God's vision of beauty is always evolving in light of our actions and community life. (PT 132)

Divine perception of the world includes not only information but affective tone; God-dess' knowledge is empathetic, feeling the feelings of the individuals. She-he feels how we feel without feeling as we feel, like people can clearly remember emotions they once experienced without actually experiencing those emotions in the present.

Besides complications introduced by quantum physics, events do not occur because we know about them; we know about them, in part, because they occur. We apply the same logic to God-dess. Time is like a line being added to from moment to moment, but never complete; so there is nowhere to take it in all at once.

Since God-dess sets the laws of nature, he-she knows much of the future is open—what the laws allow and what they do not allow. God-dess also knows the conditions individuals' decisions set upon future actualization, opening up some possibilities and closing others.

## 6. Devotional Life

The . . . previous *acaryas* [teachers] of the authorized *sampradayas* [lines of disciplic succession] have written many spiritual literatures, which people with gross discrimination neither understand nor allow others to see. Asslike devotees who are simply interested in the regulative principles and under the control of gross discrimination are unable to attain a higher platform. Vaishnava principles are so unlimitedly exalted that those who simply remain entangled in the regulative process without endeavoring to understand the science of attachment are comparable to ordinary fruitive workers. (KS 132)

Universalist Radha-Krishnaism teaches how to surrender the will to God-dess and act on God-dess' behalf as an agent, rather than an independent actor. Thus, practitioners become free of bondage to the past through natural detachment from the outcome of work.

The phrase "I am acting" connotes egocenteredness; an essential message of the BG is the need for the self to develop a vision of theocenteredness, one centered upon the divinity, implied by the phrase "without the notion of 'I am acting'." (BG 2.71)(Schweig 55)

Therefore, without attachment, constantly perform action that is to be enacted. Indeed, by performing action without attachment, a person attains the Supreme. (BG 3:19)

As the transcendental cupid, God-dess urges life to new heights of enjoyment. God-dess enjoys all kinds of experience as play. People can maximize their enjoyment by considering the environment's needs and others' enjoyment. People co-create with God-dess by creating themselves and their environment. Experiencing ever new possibilities enhances God-dess' enjoyment as well as the individual's. God-dess exists as an essential part of all experience. "There is nothing that can exist without me—no moving or non-moving being." (BG 10:39b)

Practitioners of amorous natural devotion seek intimate communion with the divine as they re-enchanted their lives and embrace the mystery of existence. Humans are sexual spiritual beings created in the holographic image of God-dess, Radha-Krishna, the Divine Couple. Universalist Radha-Krishnaism offers a contemporary, body and sex-positive spiritual philosophy to counterbalance puritan religious tendencies that cause suffering for many. Sexuality can be a window to ultimate reality.

All scriptures agree that the conjugal mood of Vrindavana is the topmost, because the Lord's nature as the enjoyer

and the living entities' nature as the enjoyed are purely found therein.

(KS 126)

Actually all living entities are eligible for the mood of Vraja. When one's heart is filled with the mood of *madhurya*, he attains Vraja in full perfection. Out of the five *rasas*, a person is naturally attracted to the *rasa* in which he has an eternal constitutional relationship with the Lord, and he should therefore worship the Lord in that particular mood. But in this book we have only described the living entity's topmost mood of conjugal love. (KS 142)

Amorous spirituality may seem revolutionary, but it has a long and varied history. Universalist Radha-Krishnaism reintroduces it to enrich people's lives. Those repressed by centuries of sex-negativity may think it a huge leap, but it is well worth the effort to become whole.

Ultimately, Sri Mahadeva has established the Supreme Lord as the enjoyer and the living entities as the enjoyed and created a platform from which one can achieve a higher taste from material sense objects. There is no contradiction between the *tantra-sastras* and Vaishnava *shastras*. They are simply different provisions on the path of *raga* for people of different qualifications. (KS 194)

Natural devotees integrate the needs of body, mind, and spirit. They realize the interconnectedness of all existence. Practitioners bridge the gap between sacred and profane, thus healing themselves and potentially healing society as more people become whole. By transforming themselves, people transform society.

Spiritual life is not a flight from the realm of change and diversity, but the discovery and joyful embrace of beauty, creativity, and eternity within the temporal world. (PT 21)

While most people may not speak of it, many have had transcendent experiences. Amorous exchanges in which lovers experience union on a deeper level than mere physical intercourse often triggers those experiences. Sexual orgasm is as close as most people come to experiencing a unitive state of bliss in which they experience reality as it is.

Many spiritual traditions recognize amorous love as a major gateway to mystical experience. The more practitioners become conscious of the divine pervading all existence and harness their sexual energy to link to the divine, the more effective a tool it becomes to join them to the Divine Couple. Transcending dualism raises life to the spiritual level.

Sexuality was first linked with goddess. Then it became a manifestation of the union of god and goddess in human form. This

perspective makes sex more than a bodily function. As Georg Feuerstein says in *Sacred Sexuality: The Erotic Spirit in the World's Great Religions*:

To speak of sex as energy means to acknowledge that the human body is arising within the vast dimension of psychosomatic energy, which makes up the quantum reality of physical existence. According to the animistic world view, which we inherited from the Stone Age, everything is ensouled, or alive with energy. Traditional concepts such as prana, ch'i, od, mana, orenda, manito, tirawa, imunu, ntum, and meghe all imply that there is a dimension to life that is dynamic or energetic and that has primacy over the material realm.  
(189-90)

In the early twenty-first century, many are out of touch with their bodies, out of touch with nature, and thus out of touch with this subtle energy that permeates everything. Yet many seek a connection to a subtler, idealized, spiritual plane to give their lives meaning and hope. Natural devotion helps practitioners consciously commune with and relate to Goddess.

The path of natural devotion is not for everyone. It is best engaged in by people with courage, self-discipline, total surrender to God-

dess, and intense desire for mystical union with him-her.

It is an incarnate spirituality that sees the body as a temple for worship of God-ness, in whose form it is made. Practitioners learn to live as agents of the divine and work to make this world a better place for all. They transform self and world through daily living and loving. Using passions spiritually rather than repressing them, practitioners break down barriers between sacred and profane.

Feuerstein concludes:

I also believe that we need to articulate a distinct spirituality that involves guidance but not intrusive authority; discipleship and the willingness to learn from anyone but not mindless submission to a master; self-discipline but not excessive self-mortification; self-knowledge but not obsessive self-watching; and constancy but not dogmatic adherence to principles or practices. Above all, the new spirituality should overcome the dualistic opposition between heart and brain, body and mind, Heaven and Earth, God and creature, and one person and another. It should appreciate that life is a palette splashed with colors: Reality, or the numinous, irrevocably inheres in and is all things. (212-13)

Universalist Radha-Krishnaism is this new spirituality.



God-dess persuades people into conscious relationships through spiritual writings, devotees, the inner guide, and life events. Devotees consciously enter into God-dess' play to engage in ever new, enjoyable pastimes together. No one wants to experience the same old pastimes repeatedly for eternity. Devotees play a unique role on the cosmic stage with God-dess by using their unpredictable free will to create new pastimes.

Practitioners develop unique ways to live with God-dess and creation as they consciously co-create the future. When people differentiate their individual spirits from their conditioned false ego, they increase their ability to act in harmony with God-dess for the general good and attain freedom in this life. As devotees realize oneness with all things, they also realize their unique individuality.

Could it be that the *imago dei*, or image of God in humankind, involves the dynamic, relational, and imaginative entertaining of possibilities and the quest to bring them to fruition that we share with the adventurous and possibility-seeking God? Could it be that we are most faithful to God's vision for human-kind when we imaginatively envisage possibilities and then work to achieve them in light of our current personal, communal, and planetary situation. (PT 85)

Basic to Vedic thought is that beings are not the material body, mind, intellect, or ego. Those are reflected images of the spiritual body, mind, intellect, and ego. *Bhagavad Gita* says that this world (and thus everything in it) is a reflection of the spiritual world, which corresponds with ideas from classical western philosophy.

With its roots upward and its branches downward, they speak of the everlasting Ashwattha tree, . . .

Extending downward and upward, its branches are nourished by the 'qualities' [of nature], with its fresh shoots as the objects of the senses. Also stretched downward are its roots, promoting action in the world of humans. (BG 15.1a, 2)

Devotees see themselves as embodied spirits related to God-dess. The individual spirit gains control of its life and pleases God-dess. This ability differentiates humans from animals whose psyche mainly serves the body.

Practitioners' enjoyment moves from creaturely comforts to spiritual joys. Since they are often related in life, devotees need not give up creaturely comforts, but use them to please God-dess. They live abundantly in the world but are not of it—seeing themselves as free spirits just passing through.

Through surrender to God-dess' inner guidance, practitioners give up dysfunctional behavior that impedes realization of their spiritual nature and true enjoyment of life. They combine harmony and intensity to create enjoyable experiences eternally. Without dominating the body and its purpose, they live in harmony with nature and all beings.

There is one ultimate process to divert the current of attachment from sense objects. When the current of attachment meets *rasa*, it is enchanted. So if that current is diverted to a *rasa* that is superior to material *rasa*, it will naturally accept the superior *rasa*. . . .

This is the principle truth of *sadhana* [practice] on the path of *raga*. The whole life of a *sadhaka* [practitioner] on the path of *raga* is dedicated to cultivating Krishna consciousness. (KS 190)

Dualistic nature covers but never corrupts the transcendental self. The self remains qualitatively one with God-dess but quantitatively different. True self interest and maximum enjoyment exist with God-dess. By practicing devotion, the self awakens from material dreams to attain its true spiritual potential. Spiritual practices help realize these truths.

. . . they gradually engage their senses and sense objects in the service of the Lord and thus increase their internal current of *raga* by providing their senses

a higher taste. This is called *sadhana-bhakti*. (KS 193)

When people open to the creative-responsive love of God-dess, they receive that which cannot be attained otherwise. God-dess' love opens the door to the eternal spiritual realm for their full enjoyment. As they surrender to God-dess' love, they learn to channel that love to all.

By offering love one recognizes me fully and who I am in truth. Once knowing me in truth, one comes to me immediately.

Even though continually enacting all activities, fully taking refuge in me, by my grace one attains the everpresent eternal dwelling. (BG 18.55-56)

Devotees model their relationship with Radha-Krishna on the eternal residents of Braj. Sources, such as the *Bhagavat* and the writings of Chaitanya's followers, extensively document and develop the process of integrating into the play of Radha-Krishna. I thoroughly present this in *Universalist Radha-Krishnaism: The Way of Natural Devotion*. These writings contain exquisitely beautiful details of life in that transcendental land.

Vedic religious systems include many rituals that evoke certain emotions in the participants. An elaborate belief system rooted in ancient teachings and myths strengthens these emotions. Its highly developed theology makes it

the center of a coherent ordering of life directing thought and action toward a unified purpose.

. . . experiences of beauty and justice in this world shape the nature of our post-mortem experience. The quality of our post-mortem experience emerges in the dynamic interdependence of our earthly experiences as well as our specific belief systems. (PT 139)

Devotional practices—such as hearing, chanting, remembering, worshiping, and working to better the world—open practitioners to the presence of God-dess. God-dess, the spiritual realm, this universe, heavens, hells, gods, and goddesses all live within people in what Carl Jung called the collective unconscious. Natural devotion makes relating with God-dess conscious through constant invocation of Radha-Krishna's presence.

Practitioners attune themselves with God-dess and maximize enjoyment by linking individual consciousness with God-dess' and pleasing the whole. They are transformed from people of this world to residents of the spiritual world. This broad spiritual perspective also puts their present life in a different perspective. They harmonize conflicts and minimize impacts of negative acts. Such an attitude transforms this life into free spiritual existence.

Our spiritual practices awaken us to God's Spirit and its many gifts, moving in

humankind and the nonhuman world and inspiring us to acts of justice and healing for humankind and the planet. (PT 81)

God-dess possesses a predilection for novelty, and all beings have unique identities. Krishna says, "In the way they offer themselves to me, in just that way I offer my love to them reciprocally." (BG 4.11a) Devotees cannot adequately imagine what it will be like when they attain a perfect spiritual existence in relationship with Radha-Krishna, but it will reflect the mood they approach them in. Devotees following the natural way imagine themselves in their perfect body, relating with Radha-Krishna throughout the day. Longing and self-surrender to God-dess attract the mercy of God-dess, which actualizes the relationship.

Entering Radha-Krishna's pastimes opens a way of life in which devotees cultivate basic emotions, attitudes, and commitments favorable to Radha-Krishna. Devotees learn to live like the paradigmatic individuals in Radha-Krishna's spiritual world, Braj. By following their examples, devotees attune themselves with God-dess' promptings and their innate, pre-reflective knowing.

The pastimes of Vraja have been perceived and described through the process of natural *samadhi*, in the form of self-realization. Although the names, forms, qualities, and activities that are used to

describe Vraja-lila appear almost mundane, that is only because the material world created by Maya is similar to its origin, Vaikuntha. Actually the soul's natural *samadhi* is a function of the spiritual potency. Whatever is perceived through natural *samadhi* is the ideal example for the material world, not imitation. (KS 138)

Becoming a devotee of God-dess spiritualizes everything and frees people from material life even while engaged in it fully. Practitioners live in this world with heightened awareness while transitioning consciousness from this life to the next.

Seeing Krishna's artistry within the world is called seeing Krishna's picture. This material world is the reflected shadow of spiritual variegatedness. Whoever has realized this is said to have seen Krishna's picture. In other words, a person becomes a Vaishnava by three processes—seeing the Lord through natural knowledge, realizing the Lord by studying the scriptures, and seeing the Lord through His artistry. (KS 144)

When devotees live in union with God-dess, they develop inner peace that allows detachment from the ups and downs of life by putting things in a new perspective. Artificial renunciation is not helpful. No one right way to live

or act exists. People need to follow their own way based on unique life situations.

No one can destroy one whom Krishna wants to protect. The strength of regulations cannot influence such persons. What to speak of the bondage of regulations, nothing other than the bondage of love for the Lord can bind the devotees.

(KS 104)

God-dess exists beyond human understanding, experience, and expression. Yet God-dess exhibits a personal, loving relationship with people. God-dess feels compassion for all beings and experiences their happiness and distress. Devotees model their lives on God-dess and develop compassion for all beings.

Devotees see death not as the end, but the long-awaited release from suffering. Preparing for death and transition to the next life during this life makes the transition easier. When death is accepted, people can live fully without binding attachments.

In the course of devotional service a devotee must accept whatever is required to keep body and soul together for as long as Lord Krishna desires. (KS 153)

Eating, enjoying, exercise, industrial activities, walking in the open air, sleeping, riding in vehicles, protecting the body, protecting the society, and travel-

ing are all seen in the lives of swanlike persons.

The swanlike Vaishnavas valiantly remain and work among men. They are the shelter of women and are respected by them. They take part in social activities and get much experience. (KS 156)

By seeing all beings as expansions of Radha-Krishna and creation's purpose as expanding enjoyment of their play unlimitedly, practitioners see life here as non-different from life in the spiritual world. When practitioners model their life here on the lives of the residents of the spiritual world, their actions increase the enjoyment of Radha-Krishna. Just as devotees enjoy identifying with God-dess' enjoyment, God-dess enjoys through individuals like parents enjoy through their children. Like good parents, Radha-Krishna want everyone to enjoy themselves. This adds to their enjoyment.

Like a good parent, God does not seek absolute conformity to God's aim for us, but rather invites creatures to embody the divine vision in their own unique way. (PT 88)

Practitioners benefit by holistically enjoying body, mind, intellect, and spirit while engaging in natural devotion. They need not sacrifice one part of life for another. Devotees live a well rounded life progressing spiritually and materially.

Maintaining one's body and family, performing welfare activities, gratefulness, and worshiping the Lord are called constitutional activities. (KS 173)

Universalist Radha-Krishnaism offers a message of hope by presenting a spiritual dimension of life composed of conscious knowledge and bliss. Practitioners begin transitioning to the spiritual realm in this life. The more devotees shift consciousness from material to spiritual, the more their life becomes spiritual. The future is not predetermined by past modes of being.

Universalist Radha-Krishnaism practitioners envision a spiritual identity engaged in Radha-Krishna's eternal pastimes in the spiritual world, which they realize fully in the next life. A spiritual reality exists there with individuality, form, and variegation beyond spacetime, birth, death, disease, and old age.

Universalist Radha-Krishnaism's theology illumines contemporary human experience and coheres with a scientific worldview. Studying the nature of God-dess harmonizes human nature with God-dess' nature. People may then enter into God-dess' personal realm of enjoyment, beyond the limiting spacetime continuum. God-dess is love. The extreme love shared by Radha-Krishna and their devotees feels especially sweet and attractive. Radha-Krishna invite everyone to join their intimate community of lovers.

## 6.1 The Practitioner

The Way of Natural Devotion is quite simple and easy. At the same time, it is demanding and rigorous. The practitioner best approaches the path with a highly developed character that includes the traditional values of service to God-dess, country, family, and friends. The practitioner is a person of dignity, restraint, and discernment who follows a lofty code of conduct. The devotee's character combines the best of three archetypes: warrior, monk, and lover.

Devotees defend the true and beautiful as spiritual warriors. They develop a romantic relationship with Radha-Krishna and love others as their expansions. Devotees value learning in pursuit of truth and lead a self-disciplined life that facilitates development of love for God-dess. Thus they strive to live ideal lives that manifest their love of God-dess by example.

Recognizing the realities of human nature, I refuse to establish an organized religion. Being few in number, practitioners must be self-reliant and self-motivated living fully engaged in the world's existential ambiguities while realizing they are just passing through. It's all about balance and restraint.

Devotees have a generous liberal spirit, a frank forthright manner, and nobility of mind.

Each practitioner follows a unique path to actualize their perfect spiritual identity—not unlike a knight on the grail quest. Far from pretentious, devotees conceal themselves from the common person by practicing great reserve in our dealings, since most people cannot grasp what we are about.

We cultivate a broad eclectic perspective through study of varied material and spiritual disciplines. This allows us to engage the world in meaningful ways. We see the world as temporary but real, and we are called to make a positive contribution while we are here. Early leaders such as Roy Ramanand, Rupa and Sanatan Goswamis, Bhaktivinode Thakur, and my teacher, Lalita Prasad Thakur were cultured, engaged men in positions of government power. They set standards of devotional life to which we aspire. High character is seen in devotees' proper behavior that comes naturally through self-discipline and selflessness.

## 6.2 The Chaitanya Movement's Social Perspective

Due to a lack of compassion for the living entities there is a possibility that one's attachment will gradual [sic] diminish, be-cause compassion cannot remain separated from attachment. The basis of compassion for the living entities and devotion to Krishna is the same.  
(KS 131)

A devotional movement swept India from the middle of the thirteenth to the seventeenth-century. This movement unleashed a new religious attitude of devotional love. It supported the religious hopes of all and appealed to lower social classes. Universal kinship, equality of humankind, and belief in one god became its new ideals. It attacked conventional religion, rejected caste distinctions, and encouraged women to join.

This mass movement attracted leadership and followers from all classes. It opposed the priestly class that maintained a rigid, stratified caste system with themselves at the top. Only priests could perform rituals, and they became priests by birthright. Like Jesus, the movement broke caste and gender barriers. Their vision of a universal, egalitarian society based on pantheism parallels today's progressive Christianity.

Thus, Chaitanya appears as part of an on-going, spiritual revitalization movement. He was unorthodox and freely socialized with lower caste people. Like Gautama Buddha, he personally witnessed the suffering of the poor and sympathized with them. Chaitanya reached out to lower classes to improve their lives spiritually and materially.

He organized the first mass civil disobedience march in India to defend religious freedom. This launched a devotional movement that spread around the world. He galvanized many sympathizers and strengthened the base of his movement.

When Chaitanya traveled in south India, he preached among underworld robbers and prostitutes, also paralleling Jesus. Chaitanya preached a simple, mass-religion of love of Radha-Krishna based on humanism. He convincingly argued for devotion as a potent spiritual path. He also built a new society of devotees on an ethical foundation.

Amar Nath Chatterjee, of the Department of History, University of Delhi, describes him thus:

Chaitanya was essentially a dreamer, a reformer in the true sense of the term, an unassuming, devoted and sincere monk who dared to question issues that were taboo, thereby threatening to change the course of history. He raised

his voice against all kinds of injustice and social discrimination. (42)

Chaitanya inspired a spiritual vision for the next life, as well as a way to improve conditions in this life for people oppressed by orthodox religion and caste.

To present devotion convincingly today still requires questioning things many do not want questioned. Lower classes remain oppressed and subject to unjust conditions worldwide. As Jesus exhibited a preferential option for the poor, so did Chaitanya. Many opportunities exist for interfaith cooperation in the area of liberation theology to help their plight.

Chaitanya and his followers gained considerable support from royal courts. Crossing all caste boundaries, he gained support from high and low, including Muslims.

Chatterjee further explains:

Chaitanya and his associates adapted their religion to new social values. They also served the popular aspirations of the people by simplifying religion and opening its portals to all. With the aid of their religious movement they also sought to reform society at all levels. Like Kabir and Nanak, Sri Chaitanya too cherished the ideal of not living away from the community and the currents of everyday life. He was keenly aware of the prob-

lems of man, temporal as well as spiritual. (73-74)

Here we see the contextual nature of religion. Chaitanya, his friends, and followers do not operate in a spiritual vacuum but as part of a changing society and culture. Society affects them, and they affect society. Although devotion is an individual practice, the individual remains part of society and needs to make a positive contribution.



Chaitanya and his followers' acknowledgement of Radha's supreme position constitutes a major theological development. Elevation of the feminine devotional principle to the position of supreme goddess goes hand in hand with elevation of women's status in society. Even western women still struggle for religious, economic, and social equality. Seeing the feminine in God-dess helps mitigate the situation. Christian feminist theologians struggle to make that connection, but here a case more readily exists.

Chaitanya upholds the ideal of love as a basic ethical value, guiding relations between an individual and others. This greatly appeals to non-devotees and shows the universal appeal of such love, as also evidenced by Christian agape love. As Jesus says, love of God, self, and neighbor with all one's being is the most important commandment. The apostle John says, "God is love," which

certainly pertains to Radha-Krishna. If people exist as emanations of God-dess, how can they wrong another individual? Love provides the answers to many of life's problems, but it needs wider practice.

Chaitanya's teachings, like Methodism in England two centuries later, opens a new life of knowledge and spirituality to lower castes that produce many saints, poets, scholars, and leaders. Chaitanyaism is a savior of the poor since it proclaims the dignity of everyone possessing within themselves a particle of divine spirit. This again points out similarities between the two faiths. As in the Judeo-Christian tradition, salvation entails more than just individual spiritual salvation. It includes communal salvation that involves healing the brokenness of society and individuals. Society as a whole cannot be healthy until all are healthy and whole just as a body cannot be healthy if certain parts are diseased.

Women are initiated along with men and treated equally in the new devotional society. Some women devotees like Jahnava Devi, Basudha Devi (consorts of Nityanand), and Sita Devi (wife of Advaita) are spiritual teachers and played an equal role organizing the movement. Women devotees generally receive an education, and women outside the devotional community are also instructed. Chaitanya's community exhibits a rare liberalism by

welcoming women rejected by conventional society.

The Chaitanya movement educates the masses. It is based on a literary tradition and continues to develop a strong one of its own. Educating people to read and write makes the teachings available to a wider audience.

Chaitanya emphasizes basic moral virtues and nonviolence, censures the rich, and clearly denies priests' social superiority. Chaitanya works for social equality and envisions a community of devotees built on this new ethical foundation. In this community, there is liberty, justice, and equality for all.

Those who truly follow Chaitanya concern themselves with the current predicament and work with like-minded people to make a better world. If Braj represents an ideal vision of life from a medieval Indian perspective, what would that look like today? If Chaitanya formed communities based on those ideals in Vrindaban, Bengal and Orissa five hundred years ago, what would such communities look like here today?

## 6.3 Ethics

Indeed, the Gita informs us that there always will be ethical conflict in the outer world. Consequently, the text does not attempt to resolve the dilemma that befalls Arjuna, at least not directly. Instead it points to something deeper.

This work of Indian spirituality not only raises the question of the appropriate action for Arjuna to adopt, it also defines the existential challenge facing every human being. As struggling souls we ultimately attempt to transform our precarious painful world into a meaningful one. (Schweig, 8)

Radha-Krishna lovingly relate with each other and all beings. Devotees relate with them and some beings. Everything interrelates to all things on a deep level, but individual existence continues.

Ideally, devotees develop conscious relationships based on love and respect for all things knowing God-dess manifests everything. Practitioners nurture interdependence more than independence because relatedness increases enjoyment.

Whose self becomes connected to the self in all beings—that one is not tainted even while acting. (BG 5.7b)

Graham Schweig explains this as,

Consistent with the teachings of the BG as a whole, the self “becomes” (*bhuta*) the self of others empathetically, not ontologically. This statement expresses the BG’s version of the “golden rule.” (83)

However, deviating significantly from God’s personal and communal vision for our lives and our relationship with others can become sinful when we consciously choose behaviors that are self-centered and harmful to ourselves and others. God’s vision for each moment is never individualistic, but always has a social component. (PT 88)

Devotees experience the interrelatedness of all things as finite emanations of God-dess. They relate to creation as part of God-dess and care for it as they care for themselves. People depend on Earth, and it depends on humans.

Creation lives, and God-dess constitutes its spirit. Expressed in the language of contemporary science, God-dess expands through the big bang to become all things. The one becomes many but remains one.

One who sees me everywhere and sees all things in me, (BG 6.30a)

One who, abiding in oneness, offers love to me as the One who abides in all beings, in whatever way one appears to

be living—that one is a yogi who lives in me. (BG 6.31)

God-dess promotes enjoyment. God-dess' loving, creative influence promotes what people experience as intrinsically good. Since God-dess wants everyone to enjoy, people's enjoyment should not inhibit the enjoyment of others. We take the non-anthropocentric and non-relativist position that non-human beings experiences are valuable whether humans value them or not.

Process theologians believe that the goal of life in an interdependent universe is to experience a widening, and not a dissolving, of self, such that the well-being of others and one's own well-being are intimately connected in the moment by moment and long-term process of self-actualization. (PT 23)

As agents of the supreme enjoyer, devotees make the present and future enjoyable for all. This is their primary obligation, not following myriad rules, fixed principles, or immutable, moral absolutes that suck enjoyment out of life. Determine what is required to maximize possibilities for present and future enjoyment by everyone and work to make it a reality. Obviously, this eliminates universally condemned evils like unjust war, murder, rape, and pedophilia.

The openness of the future, both for ourselves and for God, challenges us to be

creators of our own experience, taking responsibility for our moment-by-moment decisions as we seek to fulfill our role as God's companions in the ongoing evolution of the universe. Process theology suggests that the creative quest for beauty of experience may be a higher value than obedience or adherence to tradition . . . (PT 27)

Radha-Krishna provide harmony and intensity of experience leading to transcendental enjoyment unmatched in other theological systems. This life forms a prelude to eternal life. People need not sacrifice enjoying this life to attain enjoyment in the next life. Recognize the source of all enjoyment and avoid that which reduces enjoyment. As Epperly writes,

. . . ethics involves seeking to be in harmony with the nature of reality as we understand it, which . . . reflects the presence of a benevolent, expansive, and creative intelligence. Process ethics . . . is profoundly theocentric and universal in its scope. While ethical judgements often involve the relationships of humans with one another, process ethics is grounded in a vision of the whole, which includes the relationships of divine, human, and non-human subjects. (PT 103)

Universalist Radha-Krishnaism promotes reverence for all life and sees the interconnect-

edness and interdependence of all things. Practitioners employ a holistic approach that promotes responsible use of resources so they remain for future generations to enjoy. They support a harmonious social order based on thoughtful persuasion and maximizing everyone's enjoyment.

So the wise should act without attachment, desiring to act for the welfare of the world. (BG 3.25b)

Progress need not be linear. People can make sudden quantum leaps. Radical change for the better comes through new ideals that change the quality of existence. Today, individuality has developed about as far as it can. Now, people best reclaim interdependence on all levels. When they realize their enjoyment depends on others' enjoyment and all are beloved children of God-dess, they work for the good of the whole, replacing egoistic selfishness with universal love.

In an interdependent universe, spirituality and mission are intimately connected. Our faith embraces body, mind, and spirit, and in so doing, can bring healing to ourselves and others. Beyond that, the quality and orientation of our faith, whether intended or not, radiates out into the world. (PT 130)

Universalist Radha-Krishnaism provides inspiring solutions to the problems of contemporary life, individually and collectively. Many

people recognize the urgency of the situation and the radical shifts that are occurring. The future of humanity and the planet depend on choices people make. Are they life affirming or life denying?

God-dess supports fullness and abundance of life. Yet, the forces of death and destruction remain strong. People need to choose where they stand and act accordingly. No safe middle ground exists. Not choosing is also a choice. Not to act is to act. Devotees accept responsibility for their part, but remember that God-dess acts through them if they allow him-her to do so.

Issues of peace, justice, and the environment are consistent with Universalist Radha-Krishnaism's ideals as well as Judeo-Christian ideals identified by groups such as the National Council of Churches, United Church of Christ, and others. Establishing common ground, people of different faiths need to come together and boldly support these issues with a united voice. Enough war, injustice, and destruction of the environment. Enough. People need to speak truth boldly even when those in power ignore us.

## **Glossary**

Bhaktivinode Thakur - (1838-1914) father and teacher of my teacher, Lalita Prasad Thakur. A nineteenth century reformer and westernizer of Chaitanyaism. The spiritual predecessor who most influenced this book.

Krishna Chaitanya - (1486-1533) founder of the school of Radha-Krishna devotion that developed into Universalist Radha-Krishnaism. A widely revered mystic saint considered by many as the incarnation of Radha-Krishna united in one body.

Conditional revelation - God-dess revealed through human agents. While people may have a pure spiritual experience, when they conceptualize and verbalize the revelation, it becomes conditioned by their mental and intellectual capacity as well as cultural context. Therefore, God-dess self-reveals repeatedly to accommodate different people's understanding according to time and place. This is how varied spiritual paths develop.

Cosmic consciousness - Paramatma, super-soul, supreme-soul, Higher Power, Guiding-Organizing-Designing principle, Cosmic Christ, collective consciousness, indwelling witness-guide, higher consciousness, universal teacher, creator, God-dess' immanent manifestation that pervades, supports, and maintains creation.

Descending symbolism - a term coined by Shukavak Dasa to explain Bhaktivinode's understanding of symbolism, which is similar to Plato's forms or Jung's archetypes. The principle being "As above, so below." Because these symbols exist in the spiritual world in their pure form, they exist in this world in an altered form. They may be used to point to pure forms since they are simultaneously one and different from them.

Essence seeker - Bhaktivinode Thakur's *saragrahi*—a person who sees beyond religious externals, is unattached to doctrine, but seeks core teachings that transcend sectarian boundaries. The essence seeker sees religion related to two dimensions—this world and the spiritual world. Things of this world are subject to logic and analysis, even if derived from scripture; things of the spiritual world are not.

Exegesis - critical interpretation of a text as it applies to its original setting and audience.

God-dess - Radha-Krishna, Bhagavan—the supreme transcendental, personal form of the absolute combining masculine and feminine aspects in perfect union where two are one and yet two, the dipolar monad, the Divine Couple, the original cause, the primal being.

Hermeneutical leap - the interpretive jump scholars make when interpreting a text for a radically new context. This is especially needed when dealing with texts that are hundreds or thousands of years old from a foreign culture. Through exegesis, scholars seek to understand how the author and the original intended audience understood the text, and then they reinterpret it for today's audience.

Hermeneutics - critical reinterpretation of a text for a new audience.

Living the myth - a phrase borrowed from Joseph Campbell. Practitioners develop a second naiveté in which they read and meditate on Radha-Krishna's pastimes as actual events as described. They also imagine variations on those pastimes, in which they involve themselves as participants in their spiritual body. In their outer body, they see themselves as part of the living disciplic line connected to Chaitanya. They transmit wisdom to future generations as co-creators and interpreters of myth through word and deed. They embody the myth and are non-different from it. Chaitanya did this excellently.

Natural devotion - *raganuga bhakti*, practicing the spirit's innate devotion through cultivating attraction to God-dess. It involves following the example of an eternal associate of God-dess, usually one of

Radha's girlfriends, adopting her devotional mood, and imagining relating to Radha-Krishna under her guidance in a spiritual body.

Perennial philosophy - *sanatan dharma*, eternal religion, the essence of every religion that accommodates divergent interpretations of ultimate reality. It is universalist, asserting the core truth of authentic spiritual traditions.

Progressive revelation - God-dess' revelations to humanity are progressively fuller today than they were in the past. Practitioners do not look to a past Golden Age, but see present ideas as more fully enlightened by incorporating ancient and contemporary wisdom. They build on past revelation, rather than remaining stuck in the past. This goes with a progressive view of time rather than the cyclic Vedic view of ages.

Second naiveté - a term used by my Old Testament professor, Marvin Chaney, to explain how after thoroughly dissecting the Torah, it is possible to go back to a more unsophisticated understanding, but with the more informed view in the background. Likewise, although practitioners understand Radha-Krishna's pastimes to be mythological, they meditate on them as revealed symbolic depictions of spiritual reality.

Shadow complex - a Jungian term referring to repressed, subconscious contents of the

mind--those aspects people deny, are ashamed of, or deem socially unacceptable. It is healthier to make friends with the shadow and allow healthy outlets for it—such as enjoying sex in a committed loving relationship—than to act out unconsciously in a destructive manner, as is too often the case of celibate priests sexually abusing congregation members and children.

Teacher versus guru - guru is a word heavily laden with unrealistic expectations that no one can live up to. A teacher is a person students can relate to in a give and take manner as a spiritual guide. It is like the difference between Protestant and Catholic views of clergy. A teacher is a person called, trained, and empowered to provide spiritual leadership connecting people to a direct relationship with God-dess. Good teachers do not allow themselves to be put on a pedestal. They are humble, grounded, and not authoritarian. It is a teacher-student rather than master-disciple relationship.

Undifferentiated oneness - is indescribable, beyond conception, Advaita Brahman, the goal of merging with the One and losing individuality, the light, the spiritual effulgence of God-dess.

Universalism - the pluralistic perspective of essence seekers who find truth in all authentic spiritual paths and see them as manifestations of the perennial philosophy.

It is a stance that remains open to truth in all its varied forms. It does not claim to be the only way. Rather, it seeks common ground with divergent spiritual communities. However, it does not uncritically consider all paths equal.

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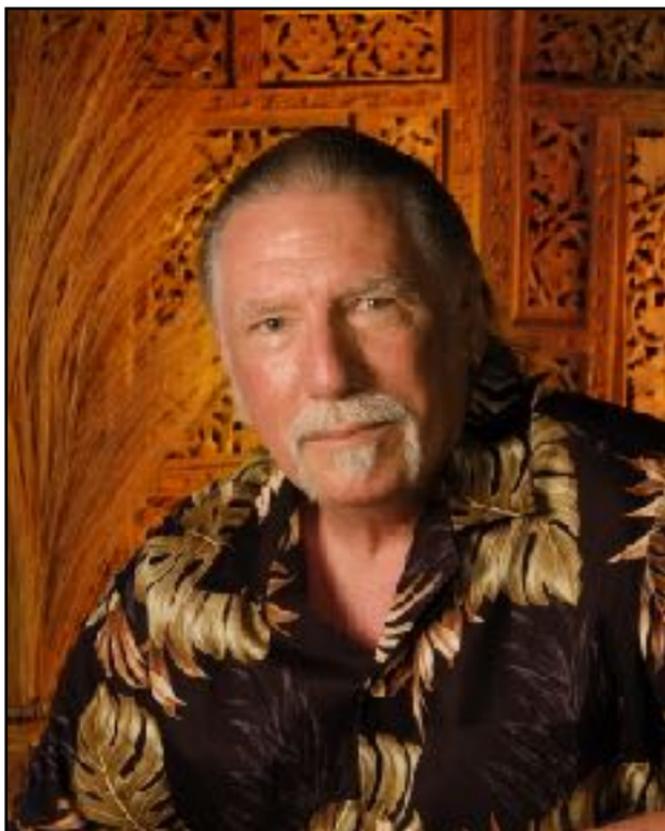
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