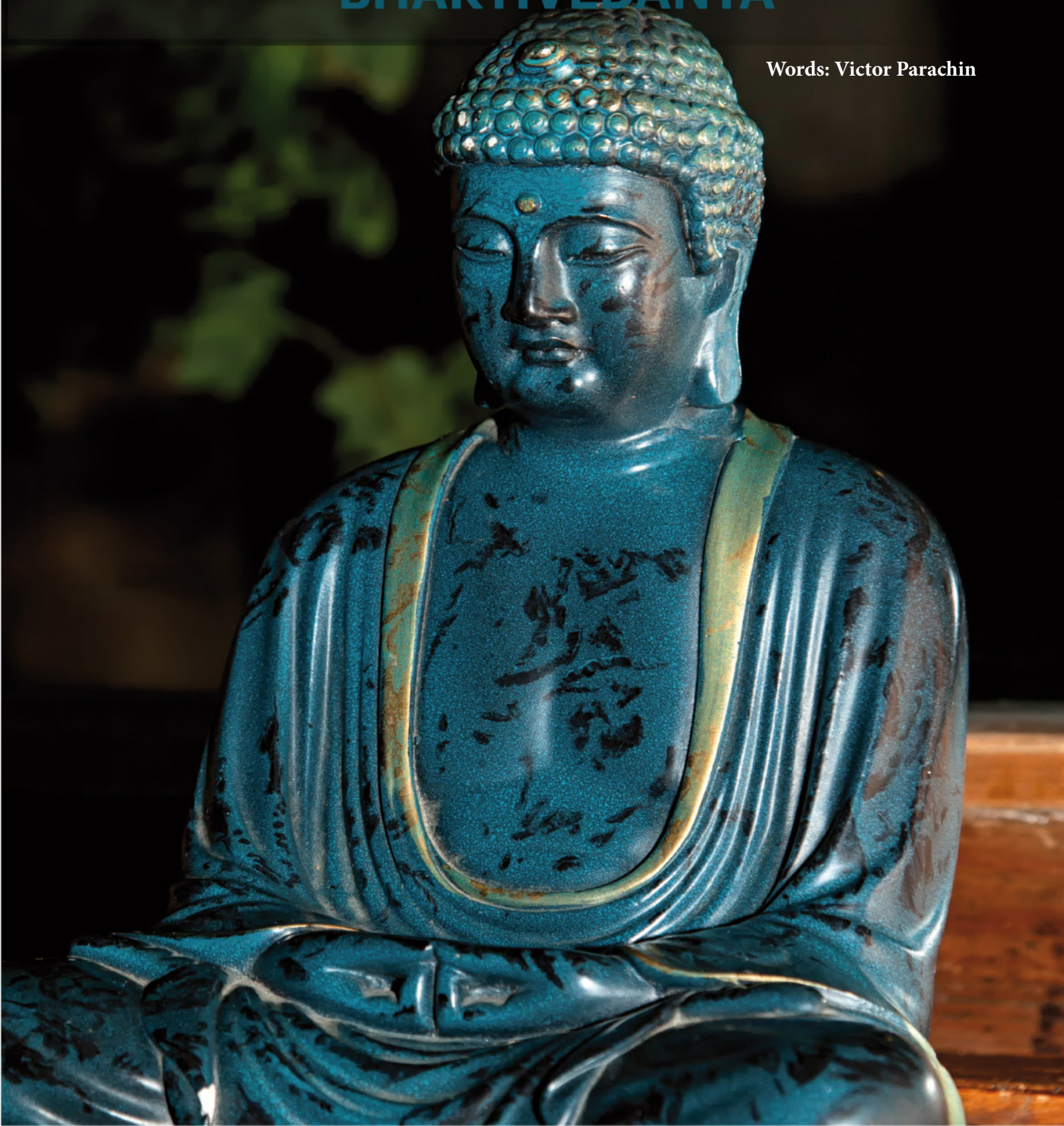


"OUR ONLY BUSINESS IS TO LOVE GOD"

TEACHINGS OF
BHAKTIVEDANTA

Words: Victor Parachin





In 1922 a guru instructed his young devotee to take Vedic teachings to the English speaking West. Four decades later, in 1965, that devotee arrived in New York city. He had traveled for more than a month via freighter, arriving with less than twenty dollars, with nowhere to go, and with no community available to support him. Confident in the wisdom of his guru and trusting in divine guidance, he began to offer Vedic teachings based upon God Consciousness.

The man who responded to his guru's invitation was A. C. Bhaktivedanta. He was nearly 69 years of age when he embarked on his mission and, over the next dozen years founded and became spiritual head of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), wrote 60 books, and established more than 100 ashrams, temples, Vedic schools, and farm villages.

Bhaktivedanta was born on September 2, 1896 in Calcutta, India and named Abhay Charan which means "one who is fearless, having taken shelter at Lord Krishna's feet." The name would prove to be auspicious and influential upon his life. Like many middle class Indian families of his time, Bhaktivedanta received a British education graduating from the Scottish Church College in Calcutta with a degree in chemistry (1920). Though he entered into a traditional arranged marriage, established a family and developed a pharmacy business he continued to explore spiritual teachings. In 1922 he met Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, a Hindu scholar whom he recognised as his guru. It was that year when Sarasvati Thakura asked Bhaktivedanta to spread Vedic knowledge and revive God Consciousness in the West stressing the importance of doing so

in the present *kali yuga* era commonly known as the present dark age of humanity.

Bhaktivedanta's deep and growing interest in living a spiritual life crowded out time for family and business. Little by little, he distanced himself from family responsibilities and secular matters turning over the pharmacy business to his son. In 1933 he was formally initiated as a disciple and, a few years later (1944) started a publication called "Back To Godhead". As there was no staff, he was the chief writer, designer, publisher, editor, copy editor and distributor. Acknowledging his limited experience as in these fields, he wrote a few paragraphs in the first issue to explain why he took on this task: "Under the circumstances since 1936 up to now, I was simply speculating whether I shall venture this difficult task and that without any means and capacity; but as none have discouraged me, I have now taken courage to take up the work."

His scholarship and authority as a Vedic teacher was recognised and he was given the name Bhaktivedanta (1947) meaning "one who has realised devotional service to the Supreme Lord is the end of all knowledge." To that name he added the prefix A and C from his original birth name. The title "Swami" was also given to him. By 1954 he renounced all family ties devoting himself to full time religious work eventually making his way to New York City. Upon arrival, he made this entry in his diary dated September 13, 1965 indicating he sought guidance from Krishna: "I do not know why You have brought me here. Now You can do whatever You like with me. But I guess You have some business here, otherwise why would You bring me to this terrible place? How will I make them understand this message of Krishna consciousness? I am very

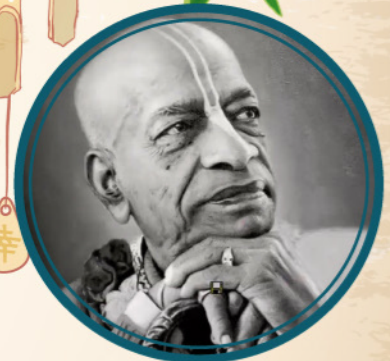
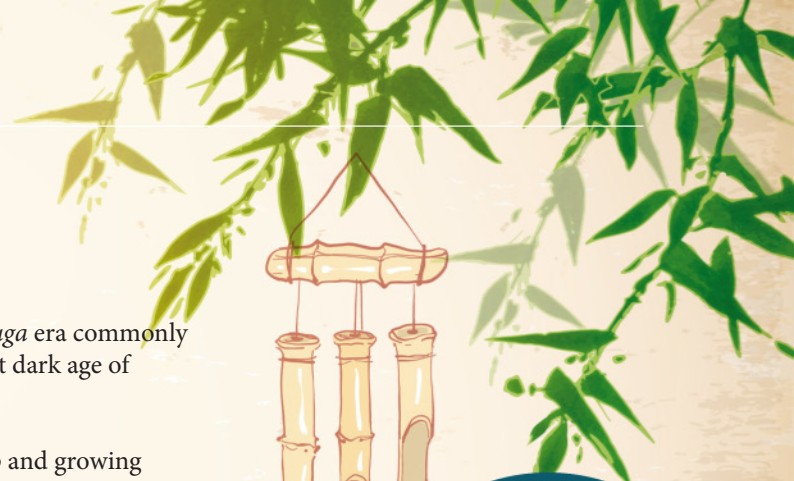


Mind is the cause of both bondage and liberation. When absorbed in sense objects, it binds; when detached from them, it liberates, revealing the path to spiritual freedom.



unfortunate, unqualified and most fallen. Therefore I am seeking Your benediction so that I can convince them, for I am powerless to do so on my own."

Bhaktivedanta began his American mission by sitting on a sidewalk in the East Village area of New York city chanting, "Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare." Though this was a familiar chant in India, it was virtually unknown in America and initially, viewed as an oddity. Asked for the meaning of the chant, Bhaktivedanta said: "Chanting Hare Krishna can deliver us from material entanglement at once, provided the chanting is pure." Little by little, Hare Krishna became a familiar refrain to Americans as his followers could be seen and heard

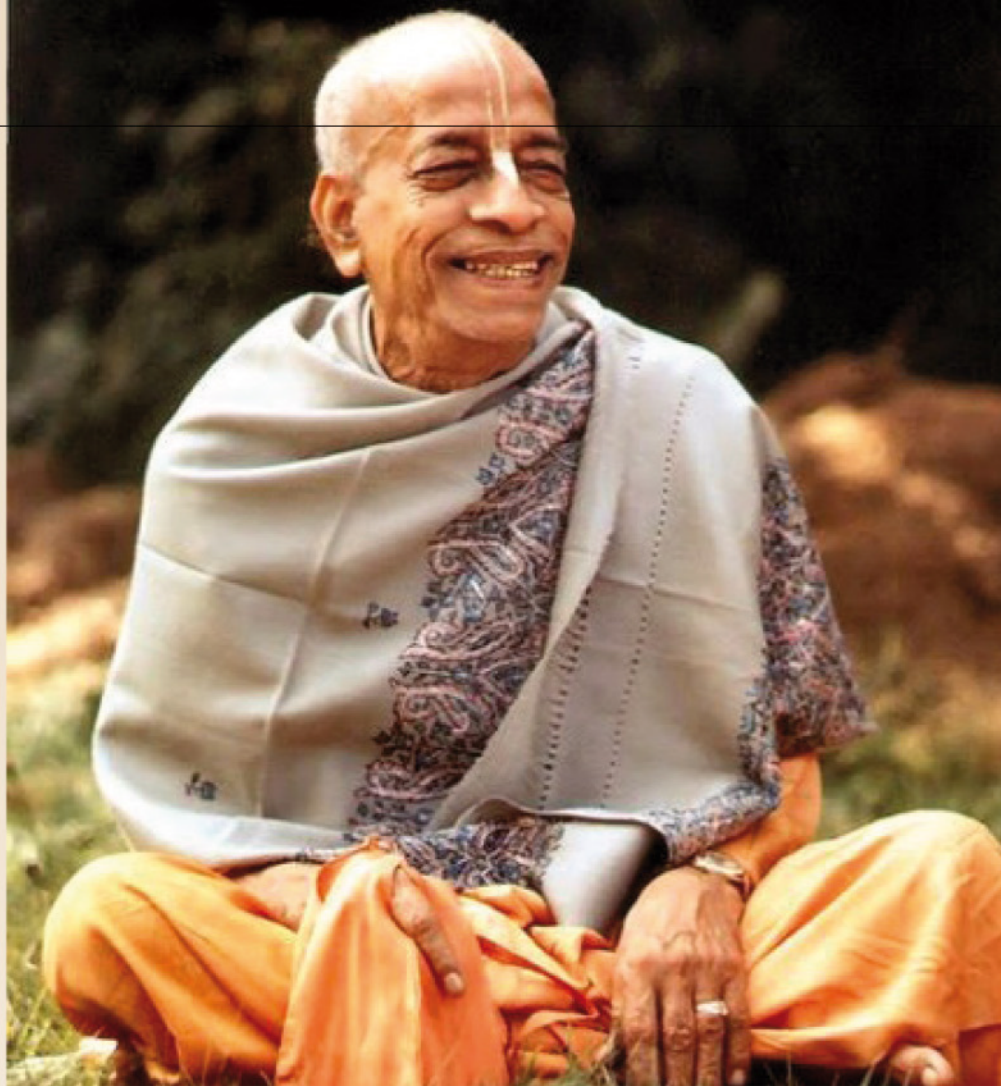


chanting in public places - airports, parks, street corners. Members of ISKCON (International Society of Krishna Consciousness) came to recognised not only via the chant but by their saffron coloured robes, males with shaved heads featuring a topknot, the ringing of bells, beating of drums, and selling books by Bhaktivedanta.

Before long, Bhaktivedanta was able to rent space on the Lower East Side where he established the headquarters of ISKCON. There, he taught classes on Vedic philosophy and practices all of which he said could temper the materialistic consciousness of Western culture afflicted with rampant materialistic impulses. In his book, 'The Science of Self Realization', Bhaktivedanta noted that humans are constructed for spiritual growth but hindered by "five strong chains, which are: (1) attachment to the material body due to ignorance of spiritual facts, (2) attachment to kinsmen due to bodily relations, (3) attachment to the land of birth and to material possessions such as house, furniture, estates, property, business papers, etc., (4) attachment to material science, and (5) attachment to religious forms and holy rituals without knowing the Personality of Godhead."

Bhaktivedanta also promoted vegetarianism reminding people that eating flesh meant committing violence against animals. He wrote: "Buddha saw the whole human race going to hell by this animal killing. So he appeared to teach ahimsa, nonviolence, being compassionate on the animals and human beings. In the Christian religion also, it is clearly stated, 'Thou shall not kill'. So everywhere animal killing is restricted. In no religion the unnecessary killing of animals is allowed. But nobody is caring. The killing process is increasing, and so are the reactions."

Along with teaching daily, Bhaktivedanta was a prolific translator and commentator of Vedic texts for



English readers. Under his guidance, the Hare Krishna movement spread all over the United States as well as Europe. One of his early and most famous converts was Beatle member George Harrison who said: "Through Hinduism, I feel a better person. I just get happier and happier. I now feel that I am unlimited, and I am more in control." Harrison's newly found spiritual path prompted him to write a devotional song, "My Sweet Lord" (November 1970). It included the Hare Krishna mantra in the chorus and topped musical charts worldwide becoming the best selling single in Britain in 1971.

Swami Bhaktivedanta died at age of 81 on November 14, 1977 in Vrindavan, Northern India in his quarters at the rear area of a temple in the city. He had returned to India because of illness preferring to die in his birth country. At the moment of his death, devotees

present began to chant "Hare Krishna" to honour him and continued to chant for a full 24 hours. In a relatively short span of time, Bhaktivedanta and his followers succeeded in making "Hare Krishna" the most famous Vedic mantra in the Western Hemisphere.

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WORDS OF WISDOM FROM A. C. BHAKTIVEDANTA

If a bag of rice is placed in a public place, birds will come to eat a few grains and go away. A human being, however, will take away the whole bag. He will eat all his stomach can hold and then try to keep the rest in storage.

Anyone who is steady in his determination for the advanced stage of spiritual realisation and can equally tolerate the onslaughts of distress and happiness is certainly a person eligible for liberation.

Religion means to know God and to love Him.

Every living creature is the son of the supreme Lord, and He does not tolerate even ants being killed.

We are always rendering service to someone, either to our family, country, or society. If we have no one to serve, sometimes we keep a pet cat or dog and render service to it. All these factors prove that we are constitutionally meant to render service.

You should not be carried away by the dictation of the mind, but the mind should be carried by your dictation.

Selfishness is either self-centred or self-extended.

Mind is the cause of bondage and mind is the cause of liberation. Mind absorbed in sense objects is the cause of bondage, and mind detached from the sense objects is the cause of liberation.

Humility means that one should not be anxious to have the satisfaction of being honoured by others.

A tree full of ripened fruits bows down naturally, because of the weight of the fruits and its willingness to make its fruits accessible to others.

To kill nothing, that is love.

One should not be happy or distressed over desirables and undesirables, knowing that such feelings are just created by the mind.

There is another world besides this material world of which we have only limited experience.

This Age of *Kali* is called the fallen age. In this age, people in general are short-living and very slow to understand self-realisation or spiritual life; they are mostly unfortunate.

The purpose of all Vedic literature is to awaken this God consciousness in the forgetful living beings, and this same purpose is presented in various ways in the different scriptures of the world for the understanding of a foolish mankind.

Simply by association with a great saintly person one can immediately make considerable advancement in spiritual life.

Indulgence in animal killing for the taste of the tongue is the grossest kind of ignorance.