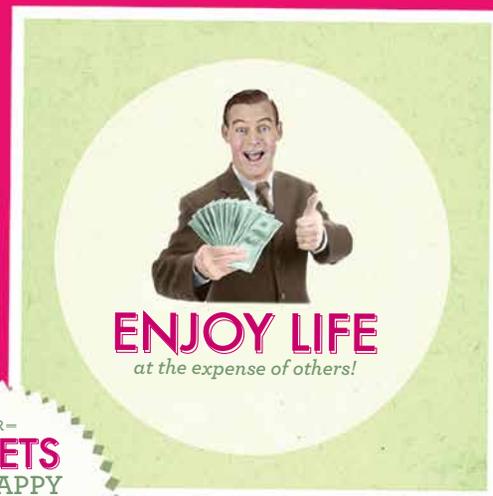


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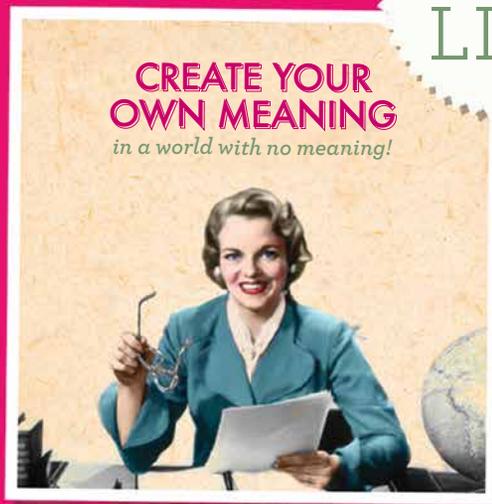
CULTURE FILE / SPIRIT MATTERS

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INSPIRE-ME-YOGI / ACTIVIST



—FOUR—
SECRETS
TO A HAPPY
SUCCESSFUL
LIFE





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From the Editor

Work, Buy, Consume, and Die. The '50s saw the dawn of the consumer culture, characterised by promises that modern conveniences were going to provide us with more leisure time and more happiness. Ah—the theory sounded good, but why is it that we don't have all this happiness we were promised?

Now, as the new millennium marches ahead on a landscape of technological distractions that entice us to consume more at a faster rate, there is growing awareness of the futility in seeking a quick fix of happiness in material things. This issue is dedicated to exploring these themes of consumerism and happiness in what I believe is our best issue yet! The article “Walking the Forest of Unnatural Happiness” wakes us up to the limitations of looking for fulfillment on the limited platform of body and mind and encourages us to look for real happiness, which is beyond material enjoyment. And if you've tried downsizing the clutter in your life and now you're wondering, what next? “The Simple Life” explores how to get the most out of minimalising. Whatever your concern or interest, there is something for everyone, as our writers examine the realities of life from a different angle.

*“All happiness in the material world has a beginning and an end,
but happiness in Krishna is unlimited, and there is no end.”*
(Sriila Prabhupada, *Raja Vidya: The King of Knowledge*, chapter 4.)

I hope that this issue inspires you to inquire about the source of happiness that has no beginning or end.

Nitya-priya

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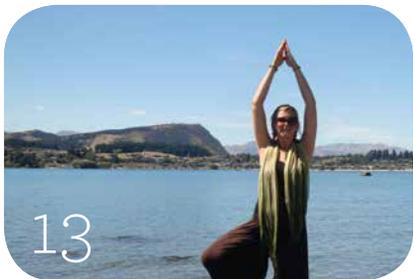
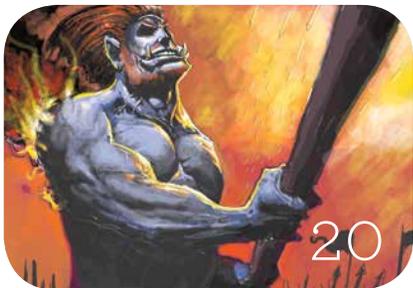
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The Simple Life

WRITER BHAVA SANDHI

Recently, a growing wide-ranging movement has emerged, advocating the virtue of the simpler life. Minimalists are among those people inspired by a desire to reconnect with the more important things in life and be responsible for earth's future; such people desire to put the brakes on the runaway train of modern consumerism and reassess: how much stuff do I really need? Is striving for the latest mod cons worth the stress and complications?

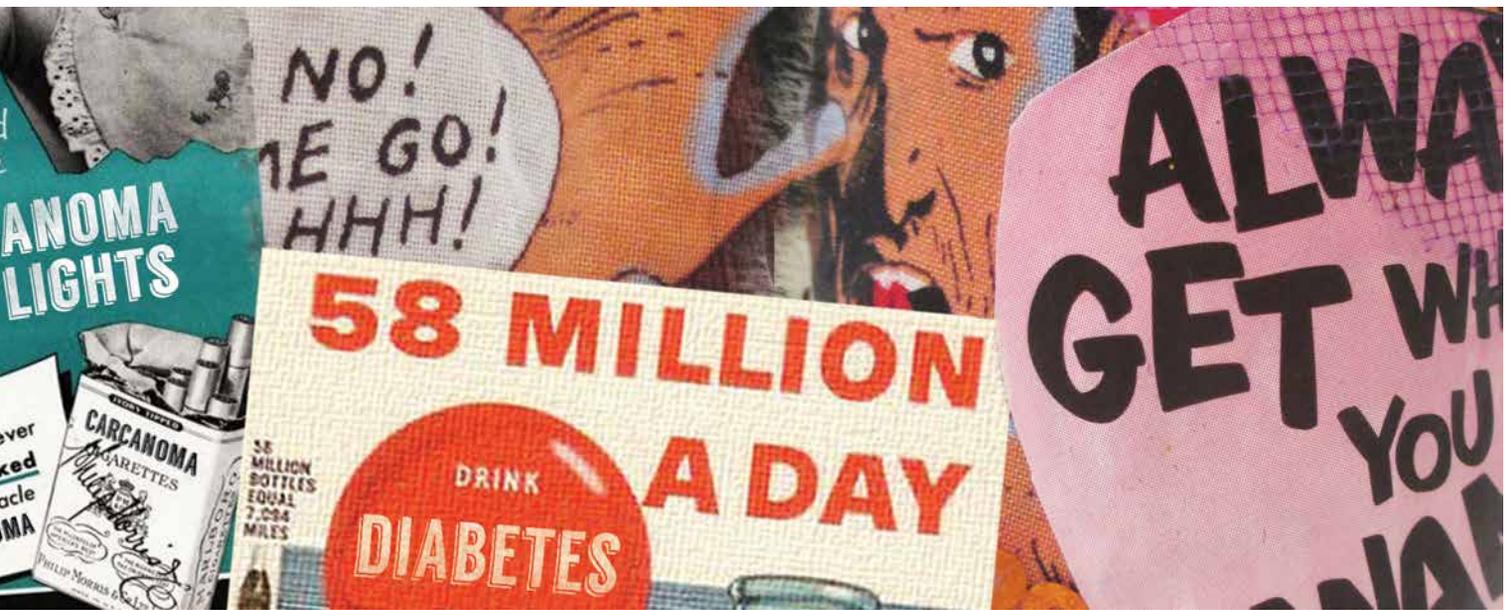
We all need a certain amount of physical and psychological comfort to be healthy, and those needs differ from person to person, so everyone will consume to some extent. But when our lives are based on excessive consumption, we risk harming the planet, society, and ourselves. Influenced by promises of happiness and success, it's all too easy to get sucked into a life bound by working hard to purchase the latest iPhone, a better car, a big mortgage on a bigger house, or trendier clothes; the list goes on. Pushed by our desires, we often find little time to stop and reflect: is the promise of happiness and satisfaction actually being delivered?

The latest rebellion against excessive consumerism involves downsizing, minimalising, and getting back to basics. One may even go as far as living in a tiny eleven-square-metre house. If you reduce your possessions you'll have less maintenance, less clutter, less cleaning, less need for space, and more time. Spending less money means you can reduce debt, be kinder to the environment, and free yourself from the envy that comes from a life of comparing yourself and your stuff to what others own. Thus you will reduce stress and dissatisfaction and live a more peaceful, happier life, right? Go small, think big, be happier, right?

But once you have simplified, decluttered, and minimalised your existence, then what? (This includes reducing alcohol, social drugs, television, and social media? Surely not!) Do you have more money, more time, more freedom, more happiness? These very same things that people struggle for with great endeavour are what people strive to achieve by adopting a simpler existence. So aren't these two lifestyles just two sides of the same coin? (Although the simpler life is a more eco-friendly and wholesome version?) With the simpler life, you think you may have some peace, but you are still left with noise of your chattering mind, more now than ever, because you have more time to hear it. So is there a deeper purpose to a downsized, simpler life?

The yoga texts from India explain that one of the fundamental purposes for simple living is it gives time and space of mind for higher thinking. Simple living, higher thinking, but think about what?

Texts such as the *Srimrad-Bhagavatam* describe in detail the nature of the



self, and understanding the nature of the self is the first step in higher knowledge. "Without knowing the need of the dormant soul, one cannot be happy simply with emolument [benefits] of the body and mind. The body and the mind are but superfluous outer coverings of the spirit soul. The spirit soul's needs must be fulfilled. That complete freedom is achieved when he meets the complete spirit." (Srla Prabhupada, 1.2.8)

So first we need to understand our identity as that which is beyond the body and mind. If we have built our lives around the misidentification that we are purely the body and mind, no amount of adjusting our temporary material situation will have any radical effect on our lives. Acquiring or rejecting the latest iPhone, car, house, or attractive partner will only satisfy us limitedly, but in general we will have to struggle in this unnatural existence.

One may recognise that the spirit soul's needs must be fulfilled, but how do we practically do that? Bhakti-yoga is the process to uncover the real self or soul by connecting to the supreme soul Krishna. The process of bhakti, with its natural lasting happiness and knowledge, is simple, easy, and enjoyable, consisting of inspiring community, wholesome food, and a lifestyle in harmony with the world and mantra, the meditation process that really uncovers our natural identity.

Moreover, with understanding and realisation of one's true identity as spirit soul, one automatically lives a simpler life. Because material desire and frustration decrease as one becomes more satisfied in the process of bhakti, one naturally consumes less, without much separate effort. The process of

bhakti also reduces stress, because one has the power and mental strength not to let difficult situations of work or study overpower his or her life; instead, the bhakti practitioner keeps things calmly in perspective. Through knowledge of subtle laws of nature such as *karma* (how what we put out there really comes back at us), one lives a responsible life, more in harmony with nature by actively caring for humans, animals, and the planet.

Human life is a life of responsibility, and if we do take responsibility for our true selves and the world around us, we will have rich, satisfying lives. Simple living alone certainly provides time and clarity of mind, but its purpose is to encourage people to think deeper and uncover their true identity. A transforming and very exciting journey... 🌿



Bhava Sandhi lives on the Kapiti Coast, New Zealand with her husband and four-year-old daughter. She loves experimenting in the garden, cooking fresh from the garden, and travelling. Taking her inspiration from bhakti-yoga, kirtan (ancient yoga chants), and her off-the-grid friends, her motto this year is "simple living, high thinking."



WAITING FOR HAPPINESS

WRITER **KALYANI RADHA**

Happiness is a term often bandied about, commandeered by marketing agencies for campaigns that purport to hold the elixir for true and continuous contentment. Buy this drink, wear this make up, use this toothpaste, chew this gum, and all of life's little inadequacies will fade into the ether. Happiness is the destination, product the vehicle, and money the key. But is there happiness that isn't bound and controlled by external material and commercial forces? This search for real and everlasting happiness is a quest for truth and substance within an environment which is intrinsically deceptive and impermanent; It is a hunt for the strong of heart and sharp of mind.

The Law of Diminishing Returns

Most people seek happiness. If you ask a random selection of people what they want for their lives or for their children's, friends', and relatives' they would most likely want for them to be happy. But do we actually know what happiness is? So often it is defined as something that can be purchased, something material that can be exclusively owned, and implicit within this definition is an implied acceptance of temporariness; what is owned will be taken, what is bought will eventually break down, and the cycle of happiness, dissatisfaction, endeavour, purchase, happiness, diminution of return and then again dissatisfaction continues unabated. The law of diminishing returns states that, once attained, an object will satisfy you for some time, but then eventually the return (or satisfaction) will diminish as you eventually tire of the object. After this, you will need to obtain something else to bring back the buzz, the excitement in life.

Human beings are social by nature and therefore a common place we look for happiness is in a relationship. The law of diminishing returns can also be seen in how we treat our interpersonal relationships like consumer items. We seek a relationship with another being to fulfill our need for deep and meaningful connections. Relationships start out new and fresh, and we feel that other person is the missing part that makes our life complete. Eventually, though, the glow fades; what was new becomes old and stale, and we move on to the new exciting model. What we are seeking is that relationship which connects on the level of the true self, but this can't happen with relationships that don't go beyond the connection one material body has with another.

Material Happiness, the Mirage in the Desert

Instead of turning inward for happiness, we tend to look outward at a bottle of Coke, a can of Lynx, a relationship, a house, or a job...the list goes on. We have an eternal candle lit in the window of these material items hoping they will draw happiness towards them. The ancient Vedic text of India, the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* states, "Just as a deer, because of ignorance, cannot see the water within a well covered by grass, but runs after water elsewhere, the living entity, covered by the material body, does not see the happiness within himself, but runs after happiness in the material world" (7.13.29). These yoga texts describe that the true form of all living entities (that's you and me) is not the material tangible body, nor the intangible mind, which are merely coverings for the real self, but the spirit soul, known as *atma* in Sanskrit. Because of these coverings, we seek outside ourselves for

The happiness found on the spiritual platform... eternally satisfies the self at its deepest and truest level; it's the buzz that keeps on buzzing.

happiness, not realising where true bliss is situated, just like the person who ventures into the desert to find water does not see that it is simply a mirage, and the real water, the real satisfaction, is elsewhere.

The yoga texts of India make a distinction between material and spiritual happiness. Material happiness is temporary and ultimately unsatisfactory, and requires a great amount of endeavour and sacrifice. The *Srimad-Bhagavatam* describes it as chewing what has already been chewed (like receiving a premasticated piece of gum. No matter how much you chew, it won't regain any flavour). When taken down to the bare bones like this, the outlook for happiness on the material platform seems bleak and tasteless, but on the flip side, the happiness found on the spiritual platform (also described using the Sanskrit word *ananda*, which can be translated to bliss) eternally satisfies the self at its deepest and truest level; it's the buzz that keeps on buzzing.

We try to find happiness using our mind and five senses. We taste good food, hear beautiful music, look at art, and it feels like we are making ourselves happy, but actually we are merely surrendering to the demands of our senses. In the *Bhagavad-gita* the mind is described as more difficult to control than the wind. A person's mind and senses are constantly demanding satisfaction, and the conditioned living entity is involved in an everlasting struggle to please them, but like a dog chasing its tail, once caught, it will only end in pain and disappointment.

Detachment, Harmony, and Bliss

On this journey we are seeking the ultimate happiness. That cannot be found when we are looking for gratification on the material platform. We

need a joy that cuts through the thick material coverings and comes in contact with the actual self. The yoga texts describe how this can be achieved through detachment from the material mind and its mental undulations and tribulations. The mind is by nature always changing, so therefore it is not a solid footing to rely on. When we are attached to it, our life is under the control of something which is in constant flux. This detachment is not any kind of artificial renunciation, like moving to the forest and meditating while subsisting on dry leaves and bark. Detachment by itself does nothing but create boredom and further agitation for the mind. The mind is characteristically active; it would be impossible to sit and think of nothing for any decent amount of time. It can be compared to a toddler; anyone who has spent any time around one knows what can happen if you sit one in a corner with nothing to do. The best remedy for a misbehaving child is engagement in some activity that is both enjoyable and beneficial. So the question is, what is the alternative to the struggle for temporary happiness? The Vedic literature teaches that the living entities are not separate units, which function in a vacuum apart from any connection. Instead, we are parts of the greater Supreme Whole. This supreme isn't some kind of fuzzy notion, light in the sky, or flutter in the heart but a personality named Krishna. The name Krishna means the most attractive, and He is known as the supreme enjoyer. An analogy from the bhakti-yoga texts explains our relationship to Krishna: when a tree is watered at the root, the entire plant is satisfied, but if each individual leaf is watered separate from the tree, the leaves will eventually wither. Similarly, when we act in harmonious cohesion with the whole, each individual living entity will experience happiness. In this way, detachment from the mind occurs when activities are performed in union with the whole. These actions, instead of exacerbating the mental wanderings of the mind, give the mind a place it can rest, a place where it can be peaceful. This is its natural state. It's bliss without come down, happiness without the hangover, the glow that keeps on glowing. 🌿



Kalyani Radha has been exploring bhakti-yoga for the past three years. She draws inspiration from studying yoga philosophy and chilling out in kirtan. Kalyani Radha loves to cook—you can always find her elbow deep in flour!

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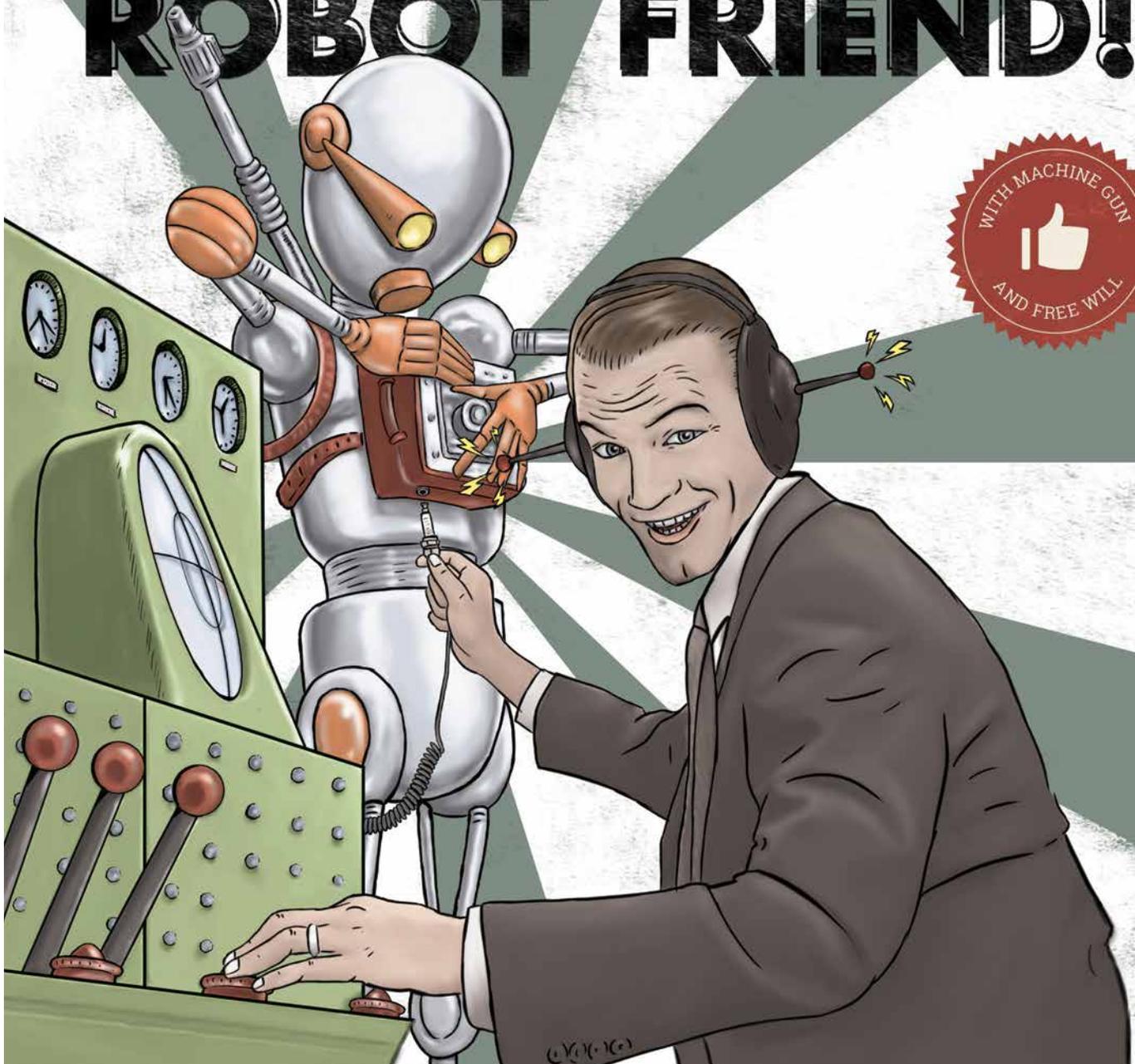
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Consciousness Is More Than Computation

WRITER **YASHODEVA**

Picture yourself in a yoga class in the futuristic “age of spiritual machines,” when conscious computers and their artificial intelligence eclipses that of the modern human. Imagine downloading the sun salute routine from your yoga instructor app and loading the software into your cyborg mind:

```
#include <studio.yoga.itn> int main <surya.namaskar.itn> int main <rotaryflexion>
```

```
#say_ommm {self} {defrag}
```

This is one conclusion we could draw when considering the prominent theories about the future of technology, particularly artificial intelligence, and its inevitable integration (or collision) with human consciousness.

Will the clash of the two most powerful forces in the known world lead to the destruction of one or the other? The subjugation of one unto the other? Or a sort of utopian symbiosis? These are the hopes and fears that define the concept of technological singularity, which is the hypothesis that artificial intelligence will eventually exceed human intellectual capacity and control, thus radically changing or ending civilisation as we know it. Now, more than ever, the fate of humanity and its environment depends upon a clear understanding of what it means to be a living, conscious entity.

Killer Ideas

The figurehead of the singularity movement is Ray Kurzweil, author of several bestsellers like *The Singularity is Near*, *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, and more recently, *How to Create a Mind*. He argues that consciousness is a series of complex patterns existing within the neocortex of the biological brain and that these patterns can be recreated upon a technological brain, a computer, to produce an artificial intelligence. He claims that technology is advancing exponentially, and thus the time when computer intelligence surpasses that of the human race is rapidly approaching.

As is the case with most scientific pursuits, this claim raises more questions than answers and more fears than hopes.

I like to think about things philosophically, so please forgive me while I ignore the hype of renegade machines enslaving the human race and get right into an analysis of artificial intelligence. You should probably know, however, that research and development of autonomous killing machines is already well underway. So much so, in fact, that the United Nations has recently held its first multilateral meeting on the subject of war and policing machines. The international Campaign to Stop Killer Robots argues that use of these machines inherently violates human rights, because the machines could not understand or respect the value of life, yet they would have the power to determine when to take it away.

As for me, I'm much more concerned to know whether consciousness is more than just computation, and if so, what is it? Is it possible that our common understanding of consciousness has been influenced by the recent decade's advancement in computer technology? A sort of mechanistic anthropomorphism in which we assume the mind to be more rational and mathematical than it actually is?

Making Music with Algorithm

It's so easy to compare the functions of the mind with the processes of a microchip, but unfortunately for the proponents of AI, it's not working. The pundits of theoretical science have tossed around many fascinating new ideas about the nature of the mind and its intelligence, but each revised theory forces the inquisitive to speculate on increasingly subjective ideas about thinking, what Australian philosophy of mind professor David Chalmers calls the “hard problems of consciousness.”

The ability to discriminate, categorise, and react to environmental stimuli is relatively easy to understand and simulate via a computer. This is the same with the control of behaviour, focus of attention, and ability to integrate information in a cognitive system. And the mechanised, robotic counterparts necessary for these functions to have real-world value, such as robotic car manufacturing and medical equipment, have been extant for a long time. But what about metaphysical emotional experience? The feeling of a deep blue colour, the joy of harmonious music or the pleasure of delicious food? Is it possible to simulate these experiences? What about love and hope, or an appreciation of justice and the value of a life?

Hard Problems with Software

The recipe for a delicious Bengali Butternut BBQ Sauce was recently cooked up by IBM's leading AI prototype, the Watson computer. This computer is famous for defeating two human opponents in a historic round of jeopardy back in 2011. Watson created the recipe for the barbecue sauce by tapping into “a set of algorithms that draw upon a number of datasets, regional

and cultural knowledge, as well as statistical, molecular and foodpairing theories to come up with dishes that pair well and are high in surprise and pleasantness. The system begins by capturing and analyzing tens of thousands of existing recipes to understand ingredient pairings and dish composition, which it rearranges and redesigns into new recipes. It then cross-references these with data on the flavor compounds found in ingredients, and the psychology of people's likes and dislikes (hedonic perception theory) to model how the human palate might respond to different combinations of flavors." (IBM Watson Cognitive Cooking Fact Sheet)

I've read some chefs' reviews of this barbecue sauce, and I'm convinced that it tastes great. Surely, most persons would be impressed; except for Watson, of course, who cannot taste nor be impressed.

Watson's tragic lack of empathy towards its own creation illustrates the hard problems of consciousness and a fundamental flaw in the AI fantasy: we cannot program a machine to be self-aware while we still don't understand our own self-awareness. The notion that software could be intelligent is based on a misunderstanding of both software and intelligence.

A Light in the Darkness of Ignorance

Understanding the mind, intelligence, and consciousness is the special expertise of the yogis, those who study their own sentience by disciplined spiritual practices and a culture of applied spiritual wisdom. They subscribe to a scientific regimen for purifying consciousness, focusing it upon itself and making the vital distinction between matter and spirit.

The perennial yoga texts of India, such as the *Bhagavad-gita*, describe consciousness as an epiphenomenon; a secondary phenomenon that occurs parallel to and as a result of a primary phenomenon. A light bulb, although equipped with all of the necessary hardware to produce light, only functions when it is powered by a remote and superior energy source. In the same way, the nonmaterial consciousness, entrenched within the hardware of an organic body, exists as a product of, and is intrinsically related to, a superior consciousness. This superior consciousness is what the yogis call Bhagavan, or Krishna, the Supreme Conscious Person.

Any contemplative person can understand that physical matter, albeit energetic, is totally unconscious; it cannot perceive itself. Further analysis will lead us to the conclusion that a distinct conscious energy is perceiving matter and interacting with it. By identifying with so many varieties of that unconscious matter, it becomes subject to illusion and, subsequently, so many varieties of suffering.

This modern age is a time when quarrel and hypocrisy is considered normal; when civil unrest is increasing, along with crime, wealth inequality,

and depression; when the planet's well-being and the health of its inhabitants are rapidly decreasing; and when the cataclysms of a ruthless material environment are apparent in war and politics, even in our own families and communities. Considering this current situation, do you think it is wise to carry on with humanity's self-destruction course, based on this fatal misconception of conscious identity? Or do you consider it a more pressing matter to revitalise the finer sentiments of spiritual consciousness and community? This is what the culture of yoga, particularly bhakti-yoga, is all about.

What Matters Most

I don't intend to paint a grim visage of a low-tech revolution or rebellion against all things scientific and technological, but practically, all of us in the technological age have to admit fault for one of humanity's most grievous self-inflicted wounds: that we've allowed the stunning achievements in the field of applied sciences, like smartphones, penicillin, or the internet, to somehow give credence to the theoretical sciences, such as the origins and purpose of existence, and especially the crippling notion that life and consciousness is nothing more than physical matter.

Much of contemporary science is what magic was for ancient civilisations. It gives a sense of hope to those who are willing to do almost anything to achieve eternal life. But somewhere along the way life has slipped through our fingers, and we're left with cold, lifeless matter, which cares nothing about our hopes or our will.

American philosopher Henry David Thoreau said, "I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by conscious endeavor." A viable, sustainable, and time-tested alternative to the endless pursuit of material "progress" lies in the spiritual technology of bhakti-yoga. Those revolutionaries who shake off the illusions of material identification and who can connect with Krishna, the Supreme Consciousness, are possessed of real intelligence, nothing artificial. 🌿



Yashodeva is an American expat with a background in culinary arts and has recently studied Ayurveda. He has spent several years learning about bhakti-yoga, in New Zealand and abroad. Now in Australia, he makes a living on good food and conversation.



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Traveller's Dilemma

WRITER **JIVA MAYA**

"It's all about the people not the place."

It's a cliché I know, but it's so true. That's what I love most about travelling—meeting such a variety of colourful characters from all over the world. Everyone is so individual and so interesting. Not like at home, where it's just the same people, day in, day out; same places, same jokes, same conversations. There's so much less drama, and people aren't judging you on your past school grades, partners, or career. I'm not X's ex; I'm not X's daughter; I'm not X's friend... I'm just me right here, right now! We're all just living and learning in the present moment.

When I first came to New Zealand I was sad to leave the people I met along the way. When you share a few nights with someone in a hostel it feels like a few months of "real time." We always say we'll stay in touch and see each other further down the coast, but naturally everyone is on their own journey and we can't get too attached. I'm getting more used to that now, and at least we'll always be connected by the good times we've shared. And by Facebook, of course, our own little nomadic network of mutual friends and tagged horrors. Plus, the more I travel, the more places I want to go, so it's good to get contacts with confirmations of couches to crash on across as many continents as possible! The possibilities are endless...

It's just a bit hard some days when I'm not feeling my best; whether it's homesickness or hormones, I guess everyone has those days. When it's good, it's so good, and all our travelling posse are just one fun-loving family. But when it comes down to it, I'm not sure there's anyone I could really turn to. It's not like I can just pop over to mum's for a cuddle and a cuppa, or call up my best friend and get that instant click. I mean, I am meeting nice people all the time, but I just wonder how many of them would care about me enough to help if I needed it? I like to think I'm a nice person, and a good friend, but if the tables were turned, would I sacrifice my fun for any of them? Hmmm.

I suppose that's one of the reasons we come away in the first place—to run away from those kinds of obligations to people, the things that get in the way of our enjoyment and self-expression. "Real life" is heavy with those ties and responsibilities, like getting dressed up for a night out then having to get a taxi home early with a weepy friend who has just seen her ex with a new girl, or even just the weekly torture of Sunday dinners at Grandma's house when I'd rather be in bed watching movies. Life on the road feels so free and light!

I just wonder if this lifestyle is a bit empty. That's kinda how I feel... like I want a bit more depth. Not enough to hold me back from my dreams, but enough to support me and anchor me in the down days. I don't know what I want. What am I looking for? The same thing as everyone else I guess: happiness. So what is the highest happiness? People would probably agree it comes from love. And love comes from relationships with people. But when I'm only spending a couple of minutes or hours or days with so many different people, how is it possible to build strong relationships where love can develop? It takes time, patience, and sacrifice to get to that level. Without that, "friendship" can just be an exchange, where each person just cares about what they can take, not what they can give.

I think I had that depth at home, but part of me thinks that I just didn't want it anymore. With depth comes drama and difficulties. And after all, the people who are closest to you are the ones who can hurt you the most. I've definitely had my fair share of heart aches and breaks. But I can't be satisfied just swimming around on the surface. All my Kodak smiles and quirky conversations are so superficial; I feel like such a fake. I just want something real.

So what to do... I can't go back into the past, but I don't really know where the future is leading me. Maybe I need to settle down somewhere and work for a while. Or go somewhere a bit more exciting, like Peru or India! Or maybe I should just go home...but then I'll be right back where I started, stuck in the mundane and dreaming of exotic escape.

I think I just need a long walk; maybe I'll find the answers on top of a mountain...I might even try some meditation up there, try to relax and take my mind off things. I don't know how I would start; my mind's like a whirlwind. Maybe I could say one of those mantras I learned at my old yoga class. At least then I can channel all this emotion into something, and the meditation might mean a bit more. I need something more than just temporary relaxation; I need answers, I need direction...I need love. 🌿



Jiva Maya developed a taste for travel in her childhood, hopping between the United States and the United Kingdom, where she now lives in Cardiff, Wales. Upon finishing college she took a "gap year," which unexpectedly lasted four years and led her to Australia and New Zealand. Her adventures and questions led her to bhakti-yoga, which she continues to pursue along with other interests including writing, reading, dance, and music.



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ILLUSTRATOR BALADEVA NITAI

The Guru and the Geek

WRITER AURIGA

I think I have acquired a spiritual guru.

Actually, I think it might be more accurate to say that he has acquired me.

I'm a scientist (astrophysicist to be precise) and I've been agnostic for as long as I can remember, so I've always struggled with the idea of God and the purpose of religion. But a few months ago, I had a spiritual experience, and since then, I've been on a quest to understand the being known as God. To learn more, I've studied and participated in various religious systems, and for the past month I've been exploring the group commonly known as Hare Krishnas.

This weekend, I participated in a festival organised by the local bhakti-yoga community (bhakti-yoga or Krishna Consciousness is the lifestyle practised by the Hare Krishnas). On the Friday, I attended a lecture. I've been attending lectures with the Hare Krishnas every week for a few weeks now, and I often enjoy their talks and find them insightful. As usual, the lecture started with some chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra. It's a very simple mantra, but I

I think I have acquired a spiritual guru. Actually, I think it might be more accurate to say that he has acquired me.

find it incredibly uplifting; the bhakti-yogis tell me the words themselves are powerful: **Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare; Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare**. The chanting normally ends with the arrival of the speaker, and Friday's speaker was an oldish (just over sixty maybe) monk-looking guy in the standard orange robes.

The title of the speaker's talk was "Too busy to be happy," and he ran a very informal session, with plenty of audience participation, much to the discomfort of some of the audience members! He began by asking several members of the audience (who were mostly students) what they were aiming for in life. Their answers consisted of the common material goals, such as a good job with lots of money, a nice house, nice car, nice partner. Next, the speaker asked, "Will these material things make you happy?" Apparently not. It's the emotional high, which comes with achieving these things, that we actually crave, and this high is inevitably short lived. The affable orator then explained the central idea to bhakti-yoga: we are not our bodies; we are in fact the spirit soul (or *atma* in Sanskrit). The idea is that the soul lives inside the body, and since it is distinct from the material body, material things inevitably cannot satisfy it. Hence, material things are not what we should seek to attain true happiness.

I kept my mouth shut through most of the talk and the questions at the end, because my questions tend to generate time-consuming discussion, and I figured everyone else in the room deserved to have the time to get their questions answered first without having to endure all that. So after most of the students had left, I stuck around for further discussion and took the

Bhakti-yoga claims not to be a religion but, rather, a spiritual science... The practice emphasises exploring the ideas yourself and experimenting in the “spiritual laboratory.”

opportunity to be a generally cheeky pain with my questioning. Fortunately, the speaker was very good humoured and carried an unconventionally serene manner, so we had a nice chat.

The next day I was at the Hare Krishna temple for the festival and who should be hosting a Q&A session but my new friend. I'd done my homework; I'd read the bits in the books that describe the basis for the arguments he was making; if he was going to talk about how futile and limited the pursuit of science is, then I was going to be prepared. Whilst not allowing myself to hog the discussion, I did my best to challenge his assertions and rout out the logic behind his arguments, to see how firm a foundation they were based upon.

The speaker brought up a point about all the bad stuff that happens in the world and how people want to love, care, and help fix the world's problems. This guy said that generally people are unqualified to help. He gave an example, "Suppose you are ill and need surgery to get better, and I offer to do the surgery. You would say to me, "No thanks, you're not qualified to do that, you're not a surgeon." The debate meandered until the speaker made the point, "If you care so much, go and get someone who is qualified to do the surgery." He then shared the insights provided in the Krishna texts and explained how people need to read them to progress spiritually and to be able to express their love in a productive way. Since this guy is pretty senior in bhakti-yoga, my question after that was, "So how are you going to enact this world-saving plan?" To which he answered, "I think I'll start with you."

Oh my! For my petulance and cheek I had been singled out for saving.

[Aside: Later on Saturday, when the same erudite Vedic master gave the lecture, a temple leader introduced him as "His Holiness." Apparently there are less than a hundred men of his station in the world. It's like I was being cheeky to the pope. Well, maybe not quite the pope.]

Finally, on Sunday I got my chance for a one-to-one chat. The topics got a bit lengthy, ranging from the ideal spiritual path in bhakti-yoga to the limitations of a materialistic-based scientific study of the universe. A person like me has much to understand about religious structures. Historical

events have made me see no need for them. Besides, I think it is possible to be spiritual and have a relationship with God without using a religion or man-made structure to do it. On the other hand, we have a human need to know that what we are doing is "right" or correct. If you act just on your own intuition, then you will interpret events based on the idea of God that you have in your head; by acting without guidance it is very easy to doubt your own thought process or, conversely, to end up feeling spiritually alone or even deluded.

Bhakti-yoga claims not to be a religion but, rather, a spiritual science. It's not science in the way that physical science works, but it does have a very reasonable method. The practice emphasises exploring the ideas yourself and experimenting in the "spiritual laboratory" (genuine wisdom from my guru there). The founding leader of the Krishna Consciousness movement said, "Religion without a rational basis is just sentiment." They are very much into combining science and religion and always recommend that you test the ideas you are presented with before accepting them. After all, the guru addressed the "whys" and "what fors" in my discussion, and when I told him I still needed to examine several other religions before I could think about accepting one, he responded, "By all means, I'll be interested to see what you find."

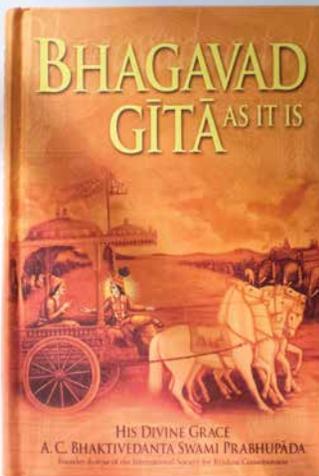
I'm optimistic about my new collaboration in spiritual science. 🌿

Former life-long agnostic, Auriga, Ph.D., is an astrophysicist seeking spiritual answers after a brush with the divine. Perpetually grappling with the inconsistencies between science and spirituality, Auriga's eventual, hopefully not too lofty aim is to find understanding and reconciliation between the two.

ENOUGH! recommends...

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A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

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When doubts haunt me,
when disappointments
stare me in the face, and
I see not one ray of hope
on the horizon, I turn to
Bhagavad-gita and find
a verse to comfort me;
and I immediately begin
to smile in the midst of
overwhelming sorrow.

– MAHATMA GANDHI

Curing Death

MOST PEOPLE, IF GIVEN THE CHOICE,
WOULD GLADLY CHOOSE NOT TO DIE.

WRITER CANDIDAS

Would you like to live forever? Does it sound attractive? For me, I would totally jump at the chance to become immortal. I would imagine that most people, if given the choice, would gladly choose not to die.

A View from Science

With the advancement of science, some people think the cure for death is just around the corner—people like billionaire investor Doug Casey. He shares his view in the following interview with fellow investor James Turk:

Technology has been advancing very quickly today. [...] We're at the stage that you can basically grow new ligaments, new veins. This is advancing and compounding [...] in a very finite length of time [...] if you can survive only another twenty years, perhaps, you might be able to grow a brand new body. And not just any old body! Maybe one that resembles Bruce Jenner's who won the Decathlon a few years ago. This is the best reason I can think of for becoming wealthy. Because you want to be able to afford wonderful things like that. And it's as it should be. Why? Because, the way you get wealthy is by producing goods and services for other people. You get wealthy by creating wealth. So, of course, people that have money should be rewarded with being able to buy these things.

11th November 2011

What do you think? Do you agree with Casey's point of view? Wouldn't it be great if we could cure death? Shouldn't the rich be entitled to get first dibs with any anti-death treatment?

A View from Ancient Teachings

Let's compare and contrast Casey's enthusiastic account of the possibilities of curing death with a section from A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada's commentary on the *Sri Isopanisad*, a book of ancient Indian philosophical wisdom:

By its so-called advancement of knowledge, human civilization has created many material things, including spaceships and atomic energy. Yet it has failed to create a situation in which people need not die, take birth again, become old, or suffer from disease. Whenever an intelligent man raises the question of these miseries before a so-called scientist, the scientist very cleverly replies that material science is progressing and that ultimately it will be possible to render man deathless, ageless, and diseaseless. Such answers prove the scientists' gross ignorance of material nature. In material nature, everyone is under the stringent laws of matter and must pass through six stages of existence: birth, growth, maintenance, production of by-products, deterioration, and finally death. No one in contact with material nature can be beyond these six laws of transformation; therefore no one—whether demigod, man, animal or plant—can survive forever in the material world.

Material scientists and politicians are trying to make this place deathless because they have no information of the deathless spiritual nature. This is due to their ignorance of the Vedic literature, which contains full knowledge confirmed by mature transcendental experience.

(*Sri Isopanisad* 14)

So, who is right? These are clearly two opposite views of the world. Let's keep exploring.

What If We Could Cure Death?

How about a thought experiment conceiving of what would happen if Casey's view of the world were to come true? Let's suppose we could cure death. The exact mechanism of such a cure is unimportant. It could be a new body grown in a vat, a drug that stops the ageing process, nano-tech machines that repair cell damage, or any number of other techniques. Let's just suppose there were some way to prevent death.

The rich will almost certainly be the first to get the cure. They have the power, resources, and influence to become deathless before anyone else. However, as soon as the news breaks that scientists have cured death, everyone will want the cure. Very quickly, a black market of salesmen will promise the cure in exchange for people's life savings. Some genuine, most fraudulent.

People will riot in the streets, demanding the anti-death treatment from their governments. You can almost hear them shouting: "Why should only those upper 1 percent get cured? We want it too!"

In a couple of years the cure will become reasonably available to everyone in the western world. It will guarantee that you will never die a natural, peaceful death. Only violent destruction of your body can truly kill you.

How do you do it? How do you develop spiritual qualities? How do you practice real yoga, going beyond mere physical exercises? How do you develop into a being of pure consciousness?

Socially, the cure will cause massive changes. Almost immediately the institution of marriage will go out the window. People can cope with being married to the same person for ten, twenty, or thirty years. But three hundred years of marriage, or three thousand years? Can you imagine spending the rest of eternity with the same person? The divorce rate is already at 50 percent, but with the cure for death it will increase to 100 percent. Marriage vows will be changed from "until death do us part" to "until we get bored of each other."

The traditional religions will protest against the cure, probably while secretly partaking themselves. They have everything to lose. What use is the promise of an after life, if the current life lasts forever? New religions will be established, religions not based on fear of death, but based on celebration of life. People will welcome humanism as their saviour, not God. A new saviour, a well-intentioned saviour, a saviour whose solutions, unfortunately, come with some unexpected and unfortunate side-effects, such as those described in the following paragraphs.

There will be no more retirement. What reason is there to ever retire? However, since no one is retiring and children are still being born, unemployment will skyrocket. How do you get a job as a young person if all the other applicants have five thousand years of experience?

Soon, everyone will have done everything there is to do, a million times over. You've taken every drug there is, you've gotten drunk in every bar on the planet, you've slept with every conceivable type of partner, you've played every sport ever invented, you've visited every tourist destination in

every country in the world. You've done everything, and so you seriously ask yourself: what's the point of it all? What goal could you possibly strive for? Intense boredom sets in: boredom leads to despair, despair leads to suicide. A wave of suicides sweeps across the population.

Still, even with people committing suicide in unheard-of numbers, overpopulation will become the number one problem in the world. Currently, without a cure for death, scientists like Hans Rosling estimate that world population will increase from the current seven billion until it stabilises at about eleven billion people by the year 2100. With a cure for death, however, there will be as many as eighteen billion people by 2100, and the number will keep going up and up, until famine or war alleviates the pressure of excess population.

You might think: "Hey, not my problem, I'll be dead by...oh."

The increase in population will lead to intense shortages in natural resources. Oil will, of course, run out. Or rather, not run out per se, but become so expensive and energy intensive to extract, that it is no longer viable to mine. Access to clean drinking water will become a closely-guarded privilege for the rich. Food production, reliant on clean water for irrigation, will become more difficult, and food shortages will ravage the world. Countries with strong militaries will try to invade less powerful nations to steal their resources, at first with some pretense of "fighting terrorism" or "peace keeping," but soon everyone will realise the wars are entirely for natural resources. Most people won't care.

Governments might even encourage these resource wars, because lots of people dying in wars effectively helps reduce the world population. Suicide might also be encouraged for the same reason. People who kill themselves might be seen as "helping their fellow man." Perhaps there will be government-sponsored suicide centres where people can safely and humanely end their own lives.

Ultimately, some nation, pushed to the brink of collapse by all the above pressures, will take to using nuclear weapons in a desperate attempt to kill off the ever-growing population. Other countries will follow suit, and humanity will self-destruct.

Perhaps curing death is not such a good idea, after all?

What Would It Take?

What would it take to cure death, but not destroy everyone's life in the process? What would a hypothetical scenario be that could let people live forever, without any negative side effects?

We would need unlimited resources, or 100 percent recycling to ensure that resources never run out. Also, people would have to have deeply meaningful, satisfying and rewarding things to do all day, every day, for eternity. We would have to have a total population of saints without any kind of selfish desire, no desire to enjoy at other people's expense. People would also have to be free of desire to harm themselves in any way. Laws and police wouldn't be able to achieve this; that would only create a police state. Instead, people would need to freely and willingly choose a saintly lifestyle, ultimately causing laws to become completely unnecessary. With such a society, and a cure for death, we might be able to realistically live forever.

Fantasy? Fiction? Fallacy? Let us turn to the Vedas, the spiritual literature of ancient India, a literature that suggests a realistic method to actually achieve the above scenario.

Spiritual Solution

The *Bhagavad-gita*, foremost spiritual literature, gives us an initial hint:

"For the soul there is neither birth nor death at any time. He has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. He is unborn, eternal, ever-existing and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain." (2.20)

There are two aspects to this statement. First, the soul is eternal: it is never born and it never dies. There is no overpopulation, because the total number of souls remains constant. Birth and death only happen to the material body, a body controlled and owned by the soul, but ultimately apart from it. There are no resource shortages, because the soul is not a physical thing and does not require any limited material resources to survive.

Second, there is reincarnation: the soul can move from one material body to another. A new body gives a new chance in life, a chance to learn from past mistakes; learn, with the previous life being remembered subconsciously.

How do we know there is a soul, a thing that makes eternal life and reincarnation possible? Well, how do we know there is a sun in the sky? We perceive both the soul and the sun by their symptoms. The symptom of the sun is light; we see the light and conclude that there must be a sun. The symptom of the soul is consciousness; we observe our own consciousness and conclude that there must be a soul.

It seems therefore, that, if we accept the *Bhagavad-gita*, we have nothing to worry about. Our consciousness, our soul, never dies.

"Wait just one minute!" I can hear you saying, "Living forever isn't enough.

People's qualities also need to be transformed. Otherwise you end up with the dystopian future mentioned earlier. How are you going to do that?"

How to Do It?

How do you do it? How do you develop spiritual qualities? How do you practice real yoga, going beyond mere physical exercises? How do you develop into a being of pure consciousness?

The secret is to practice the original and greatest form of yoga: bhakti-yoga, the yoga of loving devotion to Krishna. It's yoga practice that will gradually transform the heart, mind, and soul, ultimately leading to an eternal life of bliss and knowledge.

This transformation very much makes your life better in the here and now. You develop good qualities, qualities that lead to health, happiness, and fulfillment. Obtaining an everlasting, ever-cognizant, ever-blissful spiritual body in the future, is just a welcome side effect.

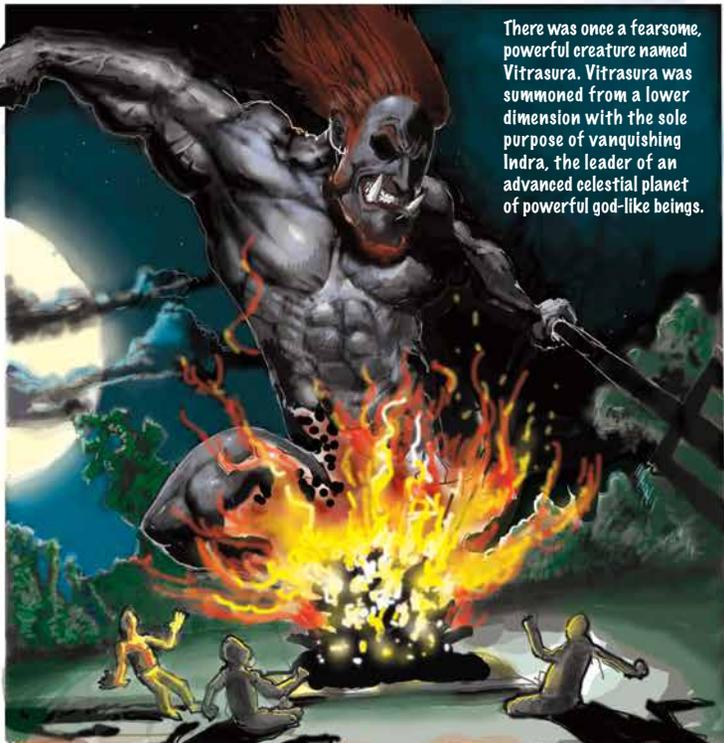
The first step in this practice is to start a regular programme of mantra meditation, chanting the great mantra, the maha-mantra, a mantra that transforms consciousness:

Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare.
Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

In the comic to follow, Dadhici teaches us that if we falsely think the material body is our true self, then we will act selfishly to preserve the body at all costs. However, the body is only a temporary covering of the eternal spirit soul. If we neglect the needs of the soul and focus solely on pleasing the body, we will inevitably be frustrated, as the body will certainly perish. With this understanding we take care of the body for a higher purpose—the purpose of spiritual enlightenment. 🌱

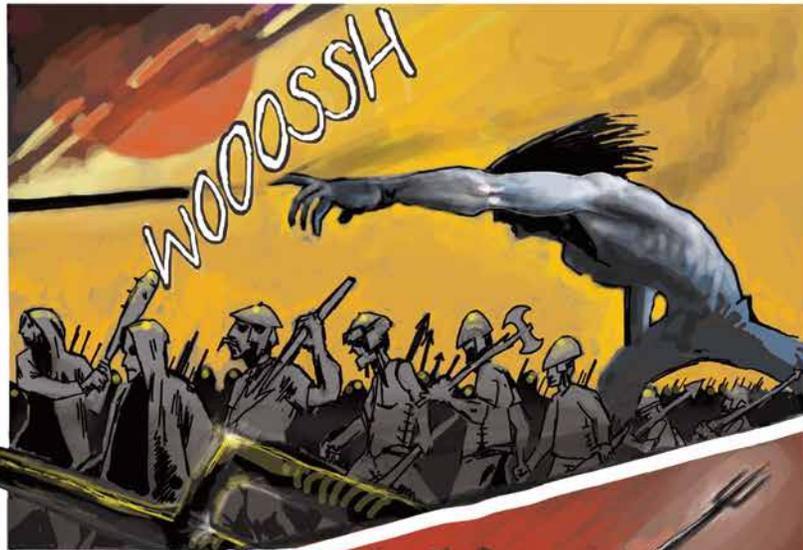


Candidas has been practising the art and science of bhakti-yoga for thirteen years. He holds a PhD in computer science and has a keen interest in all topics scientific and spiritual. His favourite bhakti literature is *Krishna* book, as it combines intricate spiritual subject matter with heartwarming stories. You can follow and contact him via his blog at: www.deltaflow.com

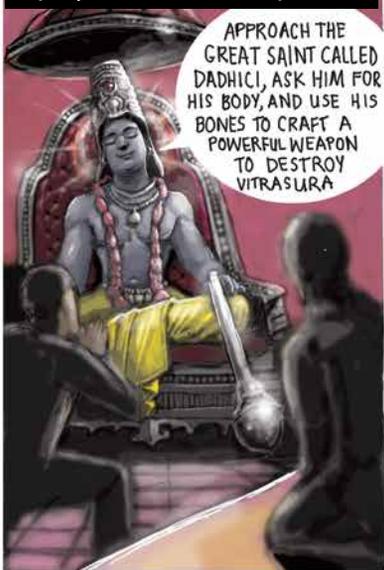


There was once a fearsome, powerful creature named Vitrasura. Vitrasura was summoned from a lower dimension with the sole purpose of vanquishing Indra, the leader of an advanced celestial planet of powerful god-like beings.





Eventually, Indra and his allies approached the original person, Lord Vishnu, seeking advice.



APPROACH THE GREAT SAINT CALLED DADHICI, ASK HIM FOR HIS BODY, AND USE HIS BONES TO CRAFT A POWERFUL WEAPON TO DESTROY VITRASURA

INDRA APPROACHED DADHICI, AND WITH SOME EMBARRASSMENT, ASKED HIM FOR HIS BODY.



Dadhici at first teased Indra with a joking response, one that rings all too true for an ordinary person.

IN THIS MATERIAL WORLD, EVERY LIVING ENTITY IS VERY MUCH ADDICTED TO HIS MATERIAL BODY. STRUGGLING TO KEEP HIS BODY FOREVER, EVERYONE TRIES TO PROTECT IT BY ALL MEANS, EVEN AT THE SACRIFICE OF ALL HIS POSSESSIONS. THEREFORE, WHO WOULD BE PREPARED TO DELIVER HIS BODY TO ANY ONE, EVEN IF IT WERE DEMANDED BY LORD VISHNU?

SRIMAD-BHAGAVATAM 6-10-4



Then, however, Dadhici revealed that he was only joking and initially refused Indra's request only so that he might hear some spiritual knowledge from Indra. Dadhici then said:

THIS BODY DOES NOT ACTUALLY DO ANY GOOD FOR ME, THE SPIRIT SOUL. IT IS USABLE ONLY FOR A SHORT TIME AND MAY PERISH AT ANY MOMENT. THE BODY AND ITS POSSESSIONS, ITS RICHES ITS RELATIVES, MUST ALL BE ENGAGED FOR THE BENEFIT OF OTHERS, OR ELSE THEY WILL BE SOURCES OF TRIBULATION AND MISERY.

SRIMAD-BHAGAVATAM 6-10-10



My standard of
conditional love
does not allow me
to like your cake.
Sound selfish?
I'm guilty as
charged.

GUILTY
SHOWED CONDITIONAL LOVE



Guilty as Charged

MY CONCEPTION OF LOVE MAY SOUND SELFISH, BUT WHO IS TO BLAME?

WRITER **MUNJARANYA**

I used to believe in the common saying, "Love is blind." But last night, I realised love is not blind; rather, I am blind to love.

Yesterday, my very dear friend underwent a lot of trouble to make me a beautiful birthday cake. The moment I saw it, my heart jumped. It looked deliciousssss! I couldn't wait to take a bite of this rich-looking fudge dream. I blew out the candles, cut a generous slice, and dug in heartily. But instead of the carob, caramel and berry explosion I had expected, my mouth greeted a dry, flavourless mix of perhaps coconut and a little sugar. To say that I was disappointed is an understatement. I'm no good at hiding my emotions. My gloomy facial expression clearly communicated the letdown. To make matters worse, I told her, "The cake you made for Kate was much better than this." Her face fell as she replied, "At least, there is a cake."

I felt like such a monster! But what could I do? I didn't like the cake.

That night, while lying in bed, I reflected on the incident. I wondered, how had I not liked the cake, despite knowing the love and the effort my friend had put into making it? Why had I not appreciated her love and affection? If she really loved me, she would have made me a berry cake, oozing with caramel sauce, not a plain old carob and coconut cake, I justified. But after an hour of arguing with myself, I finally realised how blind I had been to love.

Because my friend's cake did not appeal to my tongue, I had completely disregarded the love with which she had made it. Forget saying a few words of appreciation; I'd had the audacity to devalue her effort!

Shows how much I know about love. I have always measured someone's love for me by how they express it materially. If someone loves me, then they should execute My Desire list. If they buy me the gifts I want, make me the food I like, pamper me, praise me, then they love me. And, if they don't

fulfill these desires and expectations, then it obviously means they don't love me. As for *true love*, this occurs when one exceeds my expectations.

My conception of love may sound selfish, but who is to blame? The only way I understand something as intangible as love is when it is expressed through tangible matter. And isn't that what society teaches us anyway? Love her? Gift her a holiday. Love her? Gift her a ring. Love her? Gift her a voucher. And how do I give love? By using a bartering system! However much love you give me, that's how much I shall give you. No more, no less. Well, maybe a bit more or a bit less depending on how my day is going.

Doesn't quite sound like love, does it? So what is love? Google time. According to reference.com, love is "a profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person." Uh oh. Going by this definition, I would say, my love is subject to a simple condition. Like in a computer program, it's binary logic:

IF you satisfy my desires and my expectations, *I love you*.

ELSE, "Don't waste my time—who's NEXT?"

I know my love is conditional, but I often wonder if it is possible to love unconditionally. In Sanskrit, also known as the language of enlightenment, pure love is known as *bhakti*. I'm exploring this *bhakti-yoga* type of love, the yoga of unconditional loving relationships. *Bhakti-yoga* acknowledges that no one can live without loving someone else; it's every person's natural propensity to love, but where to situate that love so that everyone can become happy and peaceful?

So until I find out more, sorry my dear friend, my standard of conditional love does not allow me to like your cake. Sounding selfish? I'm guilty as charged.

Are you? 🌿



Munjaranya has a background in engineering, management, communications, and counselling. She loves the simple things in life: conversations, laughter, and lots of fun. Munjaranya enjoys singing her heart out and dancing in kirtans, her shelter for joy and peace.



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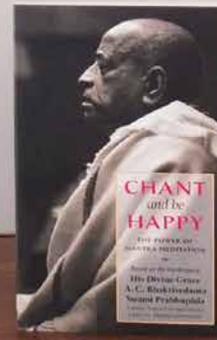
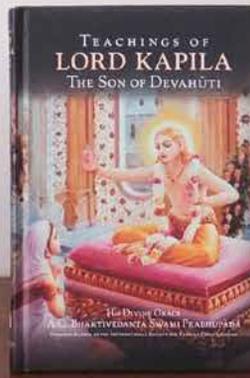
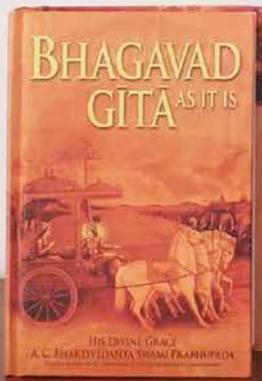
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WALKING THE FOREST OF UNNATURAL HAPPINESS

WRITER DEVAMRITA SWAMI

"I'm famished for material fulfillment," the mind begs the body. "Make me feel like a natural enjoyer."

Your senses need no pleading. "Oh yes—set us loose." They guarantee: "We'll light your fire. Saturating you with desire, we're sure to take you higher."

Quickly the piggy mind computes: "I've worked hard for the right to enjoy. I owe it to myself. Senses, lead me—happy time is here."

Wolfish, the senses assure our mind that, immersed in diverse entertainment combined with the usual gratification, ours can be moments so awesome we'll even sing out: "Life never felt so good!"

Real Yoga, Real Happiness

Real yoga develops another way: when we admit we don't know what is real happiness. Amazingly, genuine human progress begins when we acknowledge the hush-hush predicament that's actually universal: our failure at material enjoyment. The struggle, the daily grind to squeeze significant satisfaction out of material nature has cheated us. Wielding material bodies and minds through countless lifetimes, we've gained only a mirage. But who would dare confess this? Only a loser, a daydreaming no-hoper?

When the Hollywood megastar comedian Robin Williams took his own life, the world took note: "How could a man with everything—talent, wealth, fame, and on the third marriage a wife he cherished—wrap a belt around his neck and kill himself in his bedroom?"

Robin Williams was sometimes honest in analysis but utterly lacking in solutions. Once, walking off the stage to thunderous acclaim, his fans on their feet, wild for more comedy, he disclosed to fellow entertainment celeb Dick Cavett: "Isn't it funny how I can bring great happiness to all these people, but not to myself?"

Tragic indeed.

What may bewilder us even more is the report by social scientists specialising in measuring global happiness that a coolie carrying loads on his back through the streets of Kolkata experiences the same level of life-satisfaction as the average American.

How to solve the riddle of real happiness? Brave minds abandon feeble fantasies like "Be happy in your own way—whatever gets you through the day and night." If the courageous, the potential inner explorers, frustrated

Think about it. Though repeatedly stung and bitten deep in the forest of temporary enjoyment, we could reach the end of all despair and suffering? How? What's that stunning beach like, at the end of the labour-intensive trail?

by today's predator lifestyles, take to the path of valour, they can do the most good for the outer world.

A reality check begins with classic honesty that cuts to the chase: "Never mind the media-hype; the hell with what people say—I don't think I actually know what is substantial or lasting happiness." This entry-level candour can swing open the door, to the timeless bhakti-yoga wisdom of the ancients.

Appropriate knowledge, spiritual technology, can drag us drowned gratifiers to the shore. In *Bhagavad-gita*, the principal yoga text, Krishna explains: "Now please hear from Me about the three kinds of material happiness that the illusioned soul enjoys, and consequently sometimes comes to the end of all distress."

Think about it. Though repeatedly stung and bitten deep in the forest of temporary enjoyment, we could reach the end of all despair and suffering? How? What's that stunning beach like, at the end of the labour-intensive trail?

The Three Flavours of Material Happiness

First, though, let's get an overview, as Krishna categorises the threesome of material happiness.

Type number one is rare these days: the material happiness of virtuous goodness. Relished by those dedicated to genuine yoga practices, for becoming qualified masters of their own mind and senses, this uncommon and topmost material happiness can lead farther ahead—to spiritual self-realisation, enlightenment.

Krishna describes that through the lens of ordinary material consciousness, we may misperceive the happiness of a beneficial lifestyle honed by virtuous goodness. Ironically, at best we see: "poison in the beginning, but nectar in the end." (*Bhagavad-gita* 18.37)

What's going on is that to the uneducated eye, the lifestyle of self-discipline and sense control can seem unattractively strict and rigorous—even repressive. Our vision so victimised by hedonistic propaganda, we assume that the more we toss away the reins to our mind and senses—allowing them to stampede, consume, and cavort—then the more pleasure we'll achieve.

If, however, determined practitioners of authentic yogic discipline persist through these faulty presumptions, such steadfast climbers gradually recognise they're actually tasting inner calm and tranquillity.

This goodness of self-mastery, the highest level of material happiness, can then become a suitable springboard for accessing the nonmaterial pleasure of the nonmaterial self in connection to the Supreme Self.

Let's leave the rarified atmosphere of happiness in virtuous goodness and get right down to the real nitty gritty. We all know that what's so prevalent today is passion.

Krishna describes this second category: "Happiness in passion is generated by the body's senses connecting with their craven objects. At first the experience appears like nectar but then ends as poison." (*Bhagavad-gita* 18.38)

Here we have the groan and grunt approach to life, so common in material

society. Work hard, party hard. The repetitive reward for such high-energy, passionate exertion: heaps of mind-numbing entertainment combined with fleshy relationships—all spiced with periodic intoxication.

Sooner or later the passionate, mundane accomplishments and sensual gratifications unmask, revealing their identity as disappointment, distress—even disaster. The price for this seductive process is high. Depletion and dehumanisation is the payback.

The rock-bottom level of material happiness, for most, is easier to reject—that is, as a constant way of life. Krishna classifies this third variety as lethargic ignorance—outright darkness from beginning to end. In other words, not even a sham of benefit to allure us.

“The happiness that is complete delusion from beginning to end, and that arises from sleep, laziness and illusion is of the nature of lethargic ignorance. It’s wholly blind to self-realization.” (*Bhagavad-gita* 18:39)

Absorbed in this debased happiness—a type easily recognised as perverse—the dedicated devotees of drink, drugs, and half-day sleeping waste their life. Lost in cloudlands of intoxication, inertia, and daydreaming, these most unfortunate persons are more self-destructive than even those driven to achieve and indulge on the hedonistic treadmill.

The everyday go-getter, committed to passion, energetically pursues happiness in the routine groan and grunt existence that consumer societies promote. Attracted by a mirage, such a false hero labours mightily, to squeeze out some shadowy, insubstantial version of happiness.

The gutsy adventures of passion, at the onset, seem sure to deliver the fulfillment they promise. But persistently the thrill fades, abruptly or gradually. The shadowy happiness that so enticed us inevitably morphs into painful dismay at the end.

For the passionate illusory hero, the temporary, false reprieve of intoxication does play an important role. The customary weekend foray into ignorance, however, soon segues into Monday-morning realities of brace up and bear it, as the work- and school-week recommence their cycle.

The hardcore inhabitant of happiness in lethargic ignorance, however, fares much worse: aimlessness and intoxication almost 24/7. Not even a false ray of light beckons them onward. All is darkness and delusion—a wasteland from start to finish.

Genuine Heroes Offer Escape

Now let’s return to what Krishna said in the opening statement of His presentation. Sometimes, journeying through the three flavours of material

happiness, a soul trapped in the matrix of illusion may reach the end, escaping the maze.

That greatest fortune can be yours—if you can count as your friends, your allies, experts who can expose the illusion for what it is and the naught it’s worth.

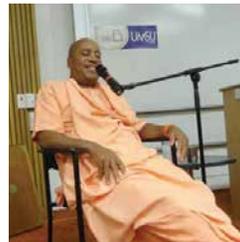
The preeminent bhakti preceptor A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, world-renowned for presenting *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, concisely elaborates on what could happen to you, while trekking through the forest of material fulfillment:

“A conditioned soul tries to enjoy material happiness again and again. Thus he chews the chewed. But sometimes, in the course of such enjoyment, he becomes relieved from material entanglement by association with a great soul. In other words, a conditioned soul is always engaged in some type of sense gratification, but when he understands by good association that it is only a repetition of the same thing, and he is awakened to his real Krishna consciousness, he is sometimes relieved from such repetitive so-called happiness.” (*Bhagavad-gita* 18.36 purport)

Yes, it happens. Real light at the end of the materialistic tunnel. But you don’t get there just by attempts to “thoroughly” experience material happiness. Endeavours to experience illusion simply grant you . . . more illusion.

Night in the forest of self-deception finally turns to enlightening day when you associate with the right persons—society’s genuine heroes—thriving outside the stale materialistic mirage and inside the dynamic spiritual reality.

Come on in from the storm. Directly from the Supreme Self, Krishna, the ultimate goal of all yoga and meditation, the wisdom-culture of nonmaterial lifestyles and happiness awaits you. 🌿



Devamrita Swami is an international speaker, author, Yale graduate, and monk. Travelling extensively on every continent of the planet, he has been sharing the path of bhakti-yoga with others for over forty years. He advocates spiritually based economics, sustainability, and environmentalism. When he is not travelling, he calls New Zealand home.

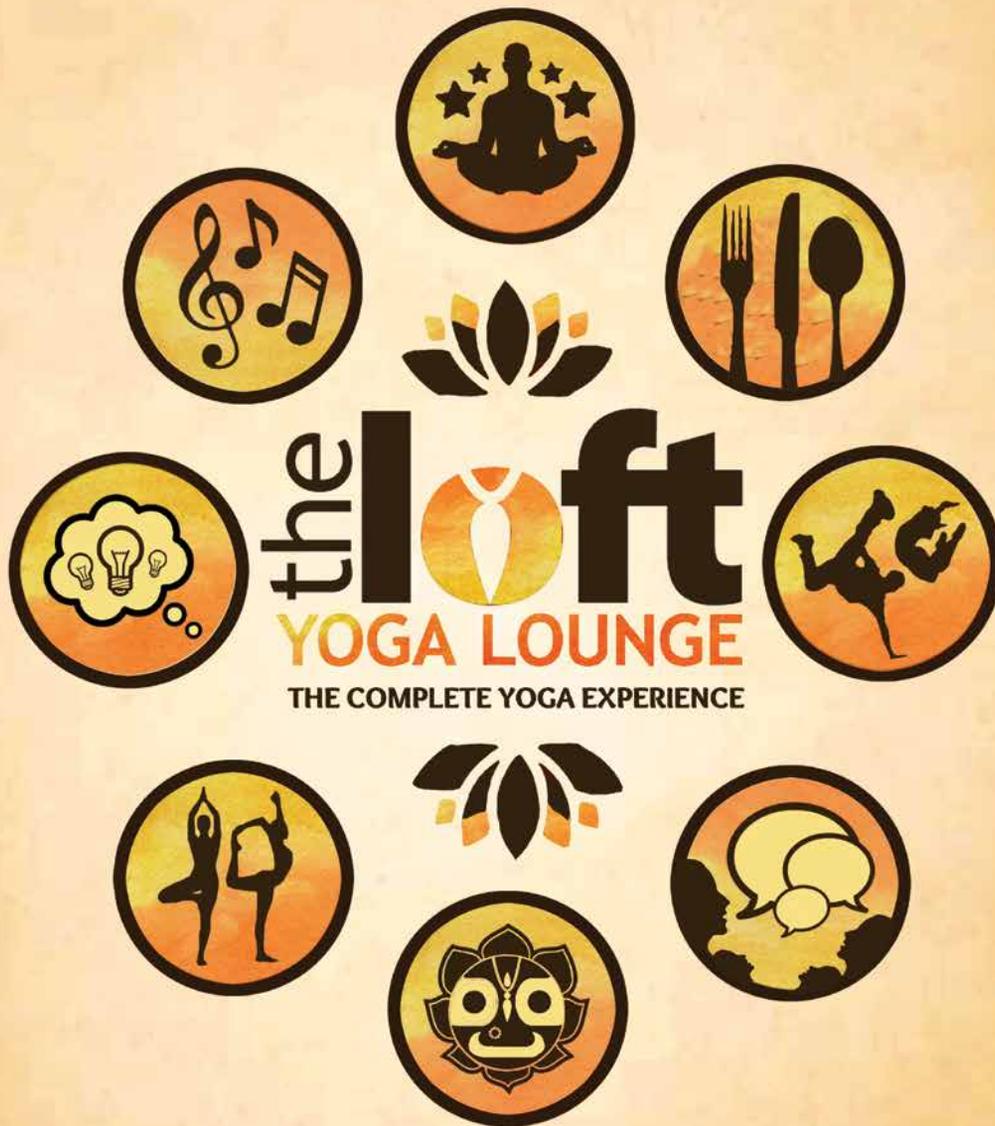


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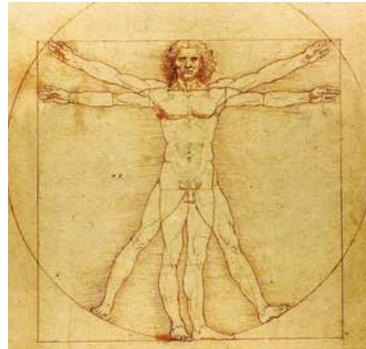
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It was certainly ghastly to imagine how my own body might look, lying dead on a dissection table.



Finding the Essence

THE SECRET REALISATIONS OF A DOCTOR

WRITER DR. CAITANYA VIHARA

Anticipation and nervous excitement filled the atmosphere. It was the first day in the dissection room for the three hundred new medical students in my year. Entering the foyer area, we slipped into our white coats and prepared our surgical kits. The doors to the interior theatre swung open, and we were hit by an overwhelming smell of formaldehyde, the chief embalming agent. Inside lay fifty veiled cadavers, evenly spaced around a large white hall. Many of us, having not even attended a funeral before, were confronting a dead body for the first time in our lives.

Stunned by the intensity of the situation, I was caught off guard by the stillness that permeated the theatre of death. While my eyes scanned the veiled bodies, I felt my heartbeat race. Reflecting on the unavoidable reality of material existence, a chill shot down my spine. It was certainly ghastly to imagine how my own body might look, lying dead on a dissection table.

My meditation suddenly broke to the sound of retching. As we assembled into allocated teams, three on either side of each corpse, several white-faced students fled, their medical careers terminating already.

After the professor of anatomy soberly welcomed us, we prepared to begin. Our tour of human anatomy would start with an exploration of the upper limb. Lifting the veil from the body, we saw the frame of an old man, "Mr. X," lying supine on the table before us.

Soon, my group elected me to the position of first dissector. Taking a moment to settle myself, I took a deep breath and unsheathed my scalpel. Identifying the anatomical landmarks, I cut down through the cold skin, half expecting the body to jump up and cry out in pain. It felt wrong to be cutting through human flesh; simultaneously, I was eager to explore the mysteries of the body. Receiving encouraging looks from my group, I continued. Carefully dissecting away the adipose (fatty) tissue, we uncovered key nerves, muscles, blood vessels, and bones.

Over the next few months, we dissected nearly every part of the body: limbs, thorax, abdomen, pelvis, and back. Finally, the time came for studying the head and neck, which require a highly technical and intricate approach.

First we investigated the face. Removing lip, tongue, cheek, nose, and eye, we were shocked at how 'depersonalised' the body had become. When I held a dislocated eye between finger and thumb, any romantic misconceptions were rapidly dispelled. I was amazed to consider just how strongly we identify people with their faces, despite the fact that we can survive without one, as many trauma victims testify.

Next, it was time for the ultimate step. Penetrating the thoracic cavity to investigate the heart and lungs had been exciting, but studying the anatomy of the brain promised even more. As a prospective neurosurgeon, I had eagerly been awaiting this pinnacle.

According to many mainstream scientists, consciousness originates from the brain. They claim that as purely material entities, our very personhood is merely a by-product of neuronal interaction. Therefore, inspecting the brain would be tantamount to understanding Mr. X himself; we would have arrived at the essence of life.

With months of study under our belts we no longer hesitated to take the next step. Obtaining the surgical saw, we fixed the head in position and called upon a rugby-playing colleague to do the needful. Slipping my gloved hands into the now open cranium, I carefully examined the jelly-like brain, working to separate the organ from surrounding membranes. Moments later, I triumphantly presented the cerebrum to my colleagues.

The grey brain gleamed under the dissection lights. Noting the gyri and sulci (ridges and furrows), which mark the upper surface of the cerebral cortex, we passed it around, discussing and inspecting.

So how did I feel at this greatly anticipated moment? Did I experience the inspiration and wonder required to propel me into a neurosurgical career?

Amazingly, I experienced quite the opposite. Gripped by a gnawing sense of anticlimax, I was shocked to note just how mundane the gross brain actually looked. Practically speaking, it resembled little more than an old, deflated football. Was I really prepared to accept that everything about Mr. X could be explained and defined by this lump of dull matter?

Pausing for further reflection, I envisioned medical students of the future endeavouring to remove my own brain. Would they then be holding ME and all of my previous thoughts, feelings, and desires within their hands? I was unable to accept this theory. Having sliced and sawed through the entire human body, I concluded that there had to be more to life than gross biology.

Despite having performed a comprehensive reduction of the human form, I realised we had completely failed to understand life itself.

In general terms, modern western science aims to explain life by reducing physical phenomena to basic elements and principles. Indeed, many physicists dream of ultimately arriving at a simple formula to “explain all that be.” Yet, despite having performed a comprehensive reduction of the human form, I realised we had completely failed to understand life itself.

It wasn't until after graduating as a doctor some five years later, however, that I obtained the knowledge to support and further explore my convictions. Inspired by a trip to India, and anxious to become more balanced, I started attending yoga classes at Govinda's, the small ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) centre in Swansea, Wales. Nourished and inspired by the rich association of the staff, my desire to find conclusive knowledge resurfaced and intensified. Inquiring further, I was directed to *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, for a comprehensive education in knowledge of the self.

On opening the book, I was immediately captured. Here at last was the sublime and essential knowledge I had been seeking for so long. Krishna's opening words to Arjuna, in chapter two, particularly hit home:

“Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings nor in the future shall any of us cease to be.” (Text 12)

“As the embodied soul continuously passes, in this body, from boyhood to youth to old age, the soul similarly passes into another body at death. A sober person is not bewildered by such a change.” (Text 13)

“That which pervades the entire body you should know to be indestructible. No one is able to destroy that imperishable soul.” (Text 17)

So clearly, endeavouring to understand the essence of life through dissecting a cadaver will always prove fruitless, since the soul, from whom consciousness is emanating and pervading the whole body, has already left.

In text 29 of the same chapter, Krishna goes on to explain:

“Some look on the soul as amazing, some describe him as amazing, and some hear of him as amazing, while others, even after hearing about him, cannot understand him at all.”

Krishna infers here that through the elevation of one's consciousness, it is possible to identify and see the soul. This is the real sum and substance of *Bhagavad-gita*. After presenting this metaphysical hypothesis, Krishna goes on to present the methodology by which we can perceive the spiritual reality. Indeed, since we are all ultimately part of this higher spiritual reality, the true interest of the self lies not in anatomical investigation, but in spiritual illumination.

Nowhere in *Bhagavad-gita* however, does Krishna ask for blind faith or fanaticism. In chapter nine, entitled “The most confidential knowledge,” Krishna describes His instructions as being:

“The king of education, the most secret of all secrets. It is the purest knowledge, because it gives direct perception of the self by realization.”

Indeed, as the great *acaryas* (teachers) of Krishna Consciousness explain, sincere engagement in Krishna's scientific process of self-realisation is so powerful that it enables the sincere candidate to verify the existence of the spiritual dimension, even whilst living within the material world. Furthermore, this ultimate life experiment can be conducted by anyone, regardless of one's social, educational, or occupational position. To begin, all one requires is the humility to admit that a higher reality could exist. So what are you waiting for? 🌿



Born and raised in the UK, Dr. Caitanya Vihara graduated from the University of Wales College of Medicine in 2007. Since then he has worked in every major specialty including accident and emergency, pediatrics, obstetrics, psychiatry, general practice, and surgery. For the past five years he has lived in New Zealand and is a keen practitioner of Krishna Consciousness.



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