

# Sri Sri Radha Manohara Temple

*By Noah Casey*

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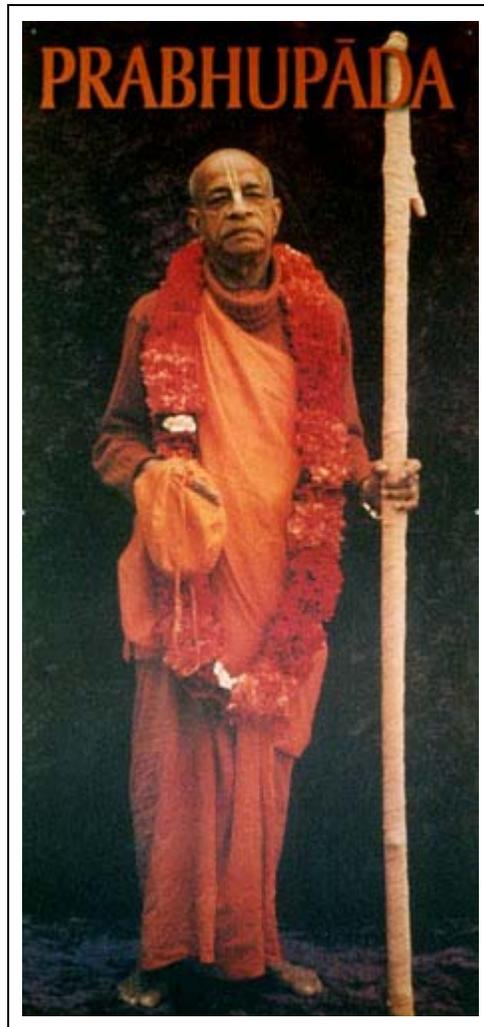
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## 1.0 Institution

### 1.1 A Brief History of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness and Its Founder

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), also known as the Hare Krishna movement, is a worldwide association of Krishna devotees who follow a sectarian form of traditional Vaisnavism. Founded by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (pictured below) in 1966, the movement gained widespread popularity first in North America and eventually across the globe.



Born in 1896 in Calcutta, India, Srila Prabhupada met his spiritual master, Srila Bhaktisiddanta Sarasvati Gosvami, in 1922. Bhaktisiddanta Sarasvati was a prominent religious scholar and is said to have been the founder of 64 Vedic institutes (*Dharma: The Way of Transcendence* 108). During their first meeting, Bhaktisiddanta Sarasvati gave Srila Prabhupada the task of broadcasting Vedic knowledge to the world in English. Subsequently he wrote a commentary on the *Bhagavad-gita* and in 1944 he started an English fortnightly magazine called *Back to Godhead*. Srila Prabhupada was in charge of every aspect of the magazine including editing, manuscript typing, galley proofs and even distribution. In 1950 Srila Prabhupada retired from married life, adopting the sacred duty of *vanaprastha* in order to devote himself completely to his studies and writing. He traveled to Vrndavana and while there put his mind and efforts to

study, meditation, and writing. In 1959 he chose the *samnyasa* path of life, renouncing his wife and his attachment to earthly possessions, and shortly thereafter began working on the daunting task of translating and writing commentary for the 18000-verse *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (*Bhagavata Purana*). Having published three volumes of the *Bhagavatam*, Srila Prabhupada moved to the United States. In September 1965, Srila Prabhupada arrived in New York City to fulfill the mission bestowed on him by his spiritual master: to broadcast Vedic knowledge to the English speaking world.

When he arrived in New York, Srila Prabhupada was quite poor. Regardless of his financial constraints, after a year he established the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in July 1966. In 1972, he founded a *gurukula* school in Dallas, Texas, thereby introducing the official Vedic system of primary and secondary education in the USA (*Dharma* 109). Over the next eleven years Srila Prabhupada would circle the world 14 times giving lectures on six different continents. He also wrote more than "fifty volumes of authoritative commentated translations and summary studies of the philosophical and religious classics of India" (*Dharma* 108) during this time, and his books have been translated into over fifty languages. On November 14, 1977 Srila Prabhupada passed away having seen ISKCON grow from a small room in New York City to a large scale religion with many cultural centres and temples practicing this form of Vaisnavism.

Throughout his life Prabhupada credited Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu, a sixteenth-century priest, as being the last full incarnation of Krishna (*Dharma* 112). Srila Prabhupada's avowed purpose for the ISKCON movement had been to "promote the well being of human society by teaching the science of God consciousness (Krishna consciousness)" according to the Vedic scriptures (*Darma* 110). By the time of his death, he had succeeded in bringing an awareness of Krishna consciousness to the West and had set up a world-wide organization to ensure the continued spreading of a message that he claimed was never his message, but that of Lord Krishna. He died having succeeded in his task of broadcasting Vedic literature to an English world that would be forever changed by his accomplishments.

## 1.2 Temple Location and Organization

The Sri Sri Radha Manohara Temple is located at:

1626 Pix IX  
Montreal, QC  
H1V 2C5

The temple is a four-level, basement included, red brick building. There are dormitories in the basement, a kitchen on the ground level; just above ground level is the worship space; and on the top floor, in two separate areas, are offices and the eating area. The building is owned by ISKCON, and is partially subsidized, though much of the funding comes from member donations and work done by the Brahmacharis who live in the building.

local chapter was founded in 1968 in a small building on Parc Avenue, but by 1975 the congregation, most likely with the help of ISKCON bought what used to be a United Church and converted it to the present-day temple on Pix IX.

The hierarchy from the top of the organization down to the temple is very precise. At the top was Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada; after he passed away, however, he gave instructions that there was to be no single governing head to the organization, but that it was to be run by a Governing Body Commission (GBC). The GBC meets annually in Mayapur, India, to discuss the official policies of ISKCON and to manage any problems or successes that the organization is facing. Each country has one representative who attends the meeting, and that representative can change, but is generally someone who has been with the organization for a long time, many having begun their training as a direct disciple of Srila Prabhupada himself. At the time of this report, the representative for Canada was Bhakti Marga Swami, a direct disciple of Srila Prabhupada. Under the national representative is a Secretary for each country. The Secretary (secretary) for Canada at the time of this report was Giri Dhara Swami from Japan, also a direct disciple of Swami Prabhupada. The position of secretary is renewed on an annual

basis. Below the national Secretary, the hierarchy divides itself among the temples, the Gurus, the temple presidents, and the Sankirtan Leaders (priests).

The Guru-Brahmachari relationship is probably the most crucial one in all of the movement, as this connection is often credited for keeping people interested in the religion and helping them advance spiritually. Larry D. Shinn, Danforth Professor of Religion at Oberlin College (Oberlin, Ohio), explains the Guru phenomenon in the context of ISKCON in the following manner:

In many interviews that I've had, devotees say empathetically that their relationship with their guru is the reason that keeps them in ISKCON. Even when it became, for some, difficult to keep the regulative principles, or when they had disputes with other devotees or conflicts with authority figures, very often it was their commitment to Prabhupada, to their spiritual master, which served as the sustaining force for devotees[...] That is true also of the new devotees. (*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna* 80)

Hence to be a full-fledged, live-in, devotee is to love Krishna and before going directly to Krishna one must come to understand complete loyalty by being loyal to one of His representatives on earth: a guru. Furthermore to ensure one's capability of a connection with Krishna one should find a spiritual guru who can help to hone and build up one's God-consciousness. As with all processes, one must start off with a smaller goal, in this case loyalty to a guru and to the principles of ISKCON Vaisnavism, and then buildup to the larger, more difficult goal of facing and embracing God. Once a person has begun to formulate an interest in the movement, the Guru-Brahmachari relationship is the first, and possibly the most necessary step, in the process of becoming a longterm devotee in the Hare Krishna movement.

The above is crucial for the Guru-Brahmachari relationship, but perhaps it would be useful to analyze what draws people to the movement. During my interviews with the Brahmacharis, most described to me a sense of longing in their lives prior to joining the movement. Many were abusing alcohol or other controlled substances, were destitute financially, emotionally, and spiritually, or were simply feeling lost in the world of materialism. In accordance with my findings, Dr. Shinn, too asserts:

What is the case is that among people who join this movement, almost all had been in a state of crisis before they joined the movement. By "crisis" I mean most often psychological crisis: a sense of identity confusion, not being quite sure where to place one's values, search for meaning, religious crisis. (*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna* 64)

Dr. Shinn goes on to explain that the process of moving from crisis to a religious movement is not surprising, nor is it a new phenomenon. Psychological studies like that of Starbuck at the turn of the 20th century, in which he interviewed several hundred young Christians, "revealed that their conversion experience was generally preceded by some degree of anxiety or some crisis-like situation" (ibid.). So, as far as new devotees to the movement are concerned, from a psychological standpoint, the impetus of an identity crisis of larger or smaller scale is not only the most likely catalyst, but is also completely natural.

Psychology aside, the devotees prefer to see their choice to join the movement in a spiritual light. "All of humanity," explained Veda Vyasa, "is born with some sense of God consciousness; it is up to them whether they choose to elevate and focus their God-consciousness to bring them to higher spiritual knowledge" (Interview with Noah Casey, June 24, 2003). It is God-consciousness that ISKCON is promoting, and they believe that the sense of longing most often found in devotees who join the religion by personal choice rather than by birthright can be understood not so much as a crisis, but as a spark of unpolished God-consciousness. The first step toward spiritual enlightenment, toward accepting one's God-consciousness, is to realize that the concerns of this world - materialism, lust, power, etc. - are trivial, and that one should look toward higher knowledge, spiritual knowledge as the most important thing for human existence. Once this realization is accepted, they can fully devote their lives to God and can begin to focus on improving and sharpening their own God consciousness.

One final word about the gurus. Unlike the traditional gurus of India, gurus in ISKCON are monitored by the Governing Body Commission. Established by Prabhupada the GBC is the over-arching organization within which gurus play their role (*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna* 82). The various gurus of the movement have to work together in a way that is not typical in traditional Indian Vaisnavism. Through the hierarchy, it is true that gurus have their own temples to lead, but rather than being completely autonomous, they are

regulated by the GBC which provides a system of checks and balanced. The ultimate effect of having to work together in this larger body, explains Shinn, down-plays the role of the guru as all-knowing and helps to keep a common perspective for all devotees and for the movement as a whole (82). Prabhupada has been on record as stating that the real test of his disciples' love for him will be whether they will be able to cooperate together in maintaining and spreading the Krishna- consciousness movement after he passes away (Gelberg 83). Thus it seems that the hierarchy within ISKCON is less one of power and more a system of checks and balances designed to maintain the movement's central focus on devotion, love and loyalty.

As explained before, each temple has a Sankirtan leader and most have devotees who live on site. The process of full indoctrination, of moving up from being a devotee to a guru, or even from a devotee to a full-fledged member of the organization is one that takes much time and study. There is no set limit on how long or how short one's stay in the temple can be. Nor is there any specific number of years that one must have been a part of the organization in order to be initiated. As one devotee who has lived in the temple for 7 years explained to me "I do not concern myself with the initiation; it will come when it comes" (July 4, 2003). The chief concern of the devotees is their daily prayer and their commitment to spreading Krishna consciousness.

At the Montreal temple, responsibilities for cleaning, cooking, bathing the deities and changing their clothes are split up among the devotees. The management, the temple President and the Sankirtan Leader address all financial and business matters of the temple. They maintain the organization of the Sunday worship services and also set up the major festivals like those of Juggernat and Krishna. They also address the spiritual concerns and matters of ritual practice of anyone in the congregation or of the live-in devotees. Besides financial matters, the management at the Montreal temple deals with maintaining correspondence between the local temple and ISKCON and the GBC. There is a weekly newspaper from the headquarters distributed by the local temple. There are also festivities to arrange - new year, autumn and spring, and deity-specific - which are left to the charge of the management. All community celebrations are planned by the management and are executed by volunteers from the community and devotees.

Information on the specific workings of where the money comes from for monthly bills, food for distribution, and maintenance of the building was not available. ISKCON is an organization that incorporates over 350 temples and farming communities as well as some 40 restaurants around the world. In addition some money is generated from the sale of books, and donations. For the festival of Juggernat (held July 12 and 13 of 2003) there was a large board with an illustration of a thermometer with various numbers along its side in increments of \$5000. On the left of the board contributions ranging from \$10 CDN to \$1000 CDN were listed and the contributors' names placed next to the gift. Monthly membership fees, however, were not mentioned.

### **1.3 The Community**

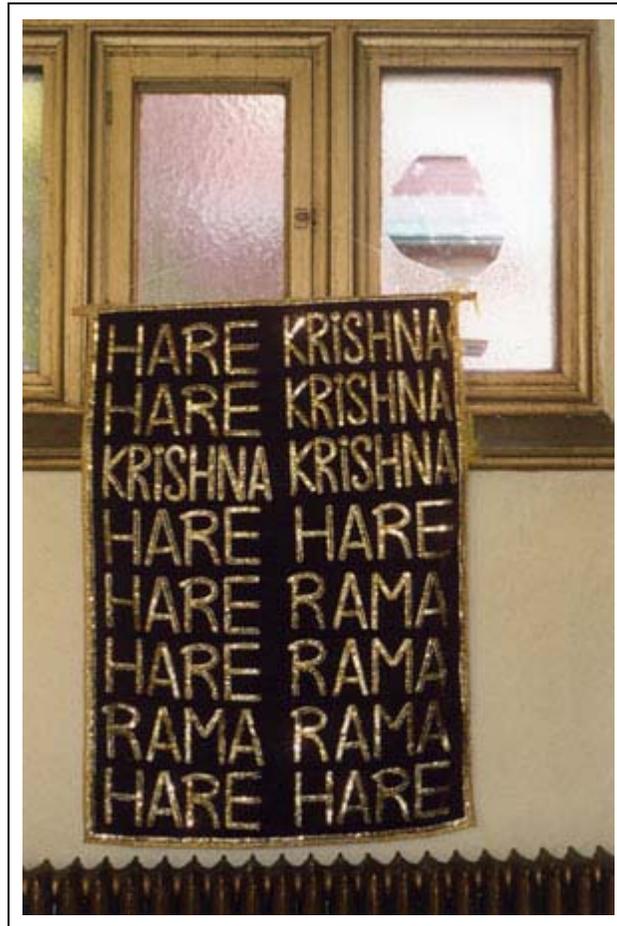
The ordained clergy of the Montreal site are Nitai and Veda Vyasa. The former lives in an apartment near to the temple and the latter lives on site with the 15 live-in devotees. Veda Vyasa, one of my contacts at the temple, hails originally from Quebec, but encountered the movement in Regina, Saskatchewan in 1981. Prior to moving back to Montreal, he lived at the Vancouver Temple for approximately 20 years. While there he eventually became president and later the Sankirtan Leader. He has been at the Montreal temple for just over 1 year. Veda Vyasa has one of the highest levels of expertise regarding proper worship practice and ritual process at the temple; he does not, however, regularly lead services. Services are led by anyone in the congregation who knows the chants and rituals, and wishes to lead. Most often, however, services are led by one of the live-in devotees. Musical instruments accompany the chanting and may be played by any member of the community who wishes to help out. Leadership of rituals is rotated on a weekly basis.

The congregation at large is a mosaic of diversity. Children as young as six months and adult devotees as old as 80 all regularly attend Sunday services. The worship group of live-in devotees is made up

predominantly of people between the ages of 20-40. During a Sunday worship service, 70 percent of the practitioners are between the ages of 20-50, with approximately 20% over the age of 60 and 10% children. The demographics of the group are not easily described. Most of the live-in practitioners are Caucasian, but are from many countries. The variance in origination of these devotees includes but is not limited to Quebecois, Ukrainian, and Russian. At the Sunday services, however, the community is much more heavily mixed. The walk-in practitioners hail from India, Portugal, Mauritius, Brazil, Mexico, the Ukraine, Russia, Canada, the United States of America, and many other countries.

There is a definite contrast in ethnicity between the live-in practitioners and the Sunday worship community. Though all share in the same faith, it would seem fair to state that the walk-in community on Sundays is made up predominantly of Hindus who were born into the religion and have chosen to worship at the Hare Krishna temple either by dint of location or by earlier contact with the religion. What seems most obvious, however, is that on Sundays the converts are either matched in number, or are outnumbered by Hindus who were born into the religion.

The congregation membership fluctuates, but service attendance is usually between 50-100 members. The language most commonly spoken among the devotees is English, though French, Russian, Ukrainian, Hindi and Tamil can also be heard. Prayer is chanted in Sanskrit, and is largely comprised of the Hare Krishna mantra (pictured below).



## 2.0 Ritual

The daily schedule of a live-in devotee is as follows:

TIME	ACTIVITY
04:00	Wake Up
04:00 - 04:30	Shower or Wash
04:30 - 05:15	Chanting in front of the deities in the sanctuary
05:15 - 07:15	Individual Meditation
07:15 - 08:00	Group Worship
08:00 - 09:00	Lecture on Sri Mad Bhagavatan
09:00 - 10:00	Breakfast
10:00 - 12:30	Duties (book distribution, personal business, cleaning, administration, organization or advertisement of festivals, cooking lunch, etc.)
12:30 - 14:30	Lunch (lunch time varies as some duties take longer than others)
14:30 - 18:00	Rest and Study
18:00 - 19:00	Lecture
20:00 - 22:00	Evening snack (optional)
21:00 - 22:00	Sleep

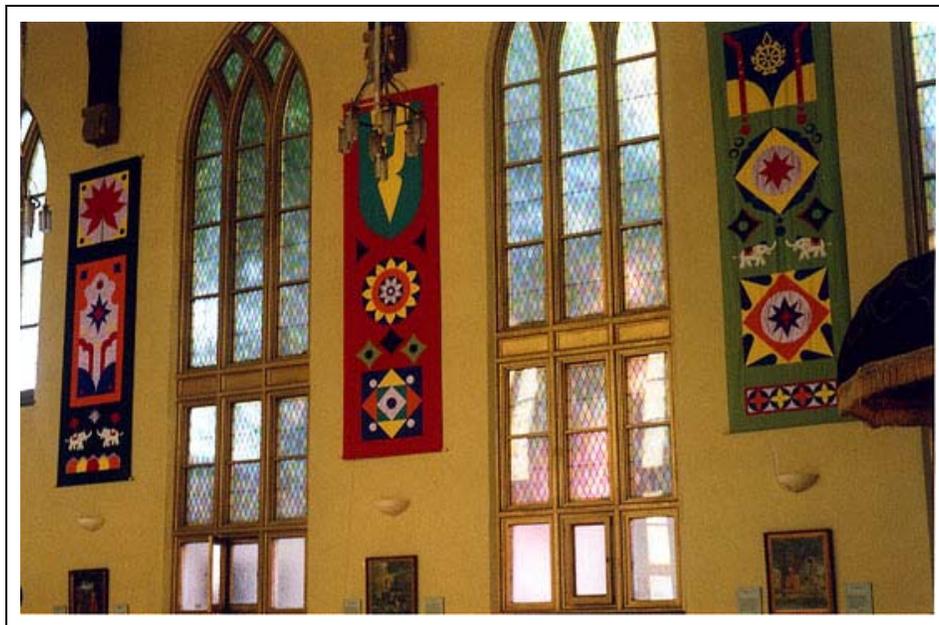
The above schedule can fluctuate occasionally dependent on events and festivals. For example, on my first visit to the temple Veda Vyasa and a couple of the Brahmacharis had come back that morning from an all-night rave party in Ontario where they had been chanting and giving out prasad. Exhausted from their journey and from the loud music and chanting, they went to bed a little earlier. Some devotees also choose to wake up slightly earlier each morning to begin their mandatory 16 rounds of Japa (beads and chanting) prior to the regular chanting and services.

The temple is open every day to the public from 07:00-20:00. The deities, however, are only available for prayer from 07:00-12:00 when they take lunch, are bathed and their clothes changed. At 19:00 each evening free lectures are offered in French and English. Services for the public are held on Sunday evenings from 17:00-20:00. I attended one Sunday evening service on June 29, 2003, and visited the temple on June 24, 26 and July 7, 2003. The service I attended was in honour of Srila Bhaktivinod Thakura (pictured below), a scholar and Court Justice who lived in India at in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His accomplishments included being a Court Justice under British rule, being a noted scholar and University Professor. One of his most significant accomplishments was his distribution of a book entitled *Lord Caitanya: His Life and Precepts* to universities all over the world including McGill.



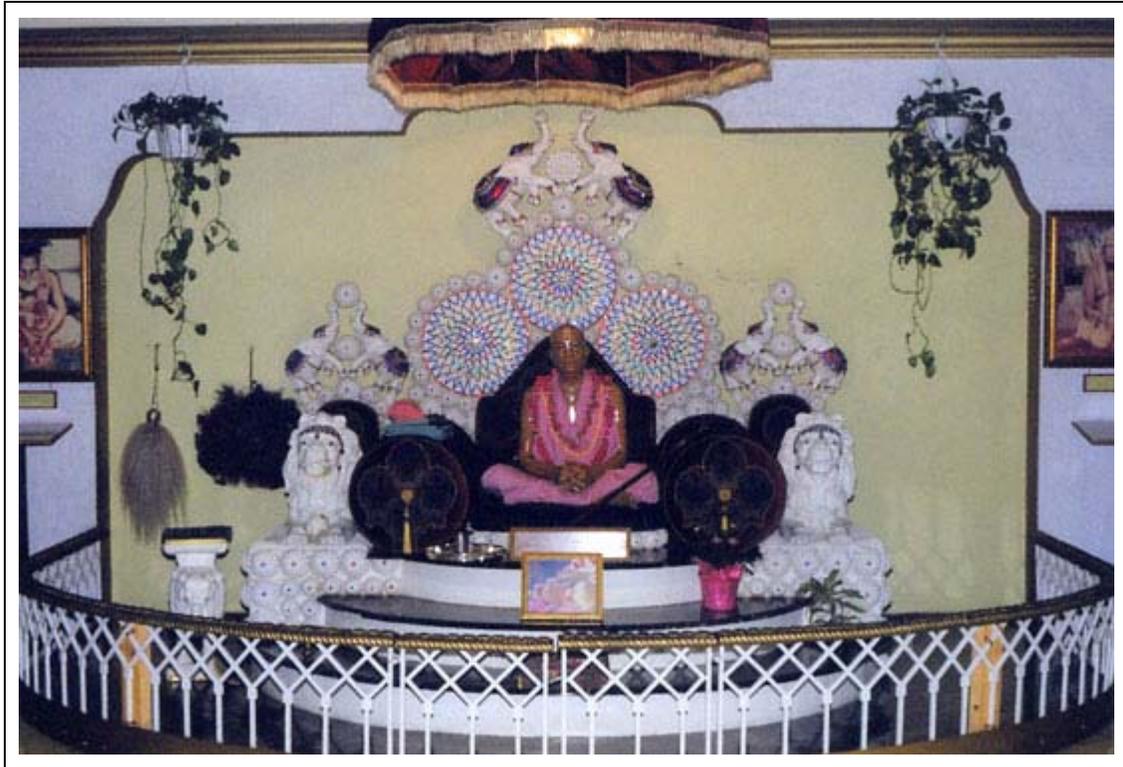
## 2.1 Ritual Space

The ritual space is on the middle floor of the temple, up a small staircase from the ground floor. The upper parts of the north and south walls are decorated with Mandalas (pictured below, the top picture is of the north wall and the bottom picture is of the south wall).



To the west, at the front of the room, is the main altar, demarcated by ornamented gates with three alcoves inhabited by the icons of the deities. At the rear of the room, the eastern wall, is a shrine to Swami Prabhupada and to his left and right portraits of key figures in the history of the movement are hung with small biographies of (in French and in English) each directly below. At the eye-level perimeter of the room on the northern and southern walls are illustrations of mythic stories from the Bhagavad-gita and a couple of key mantras are also available in the format of wall hangings and posterboards.

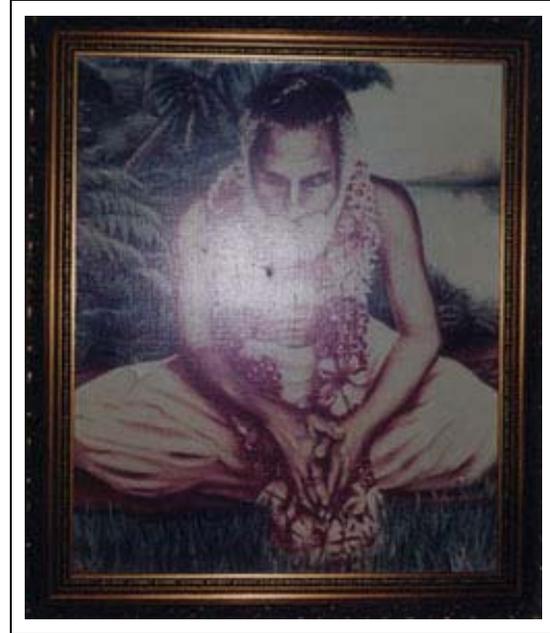
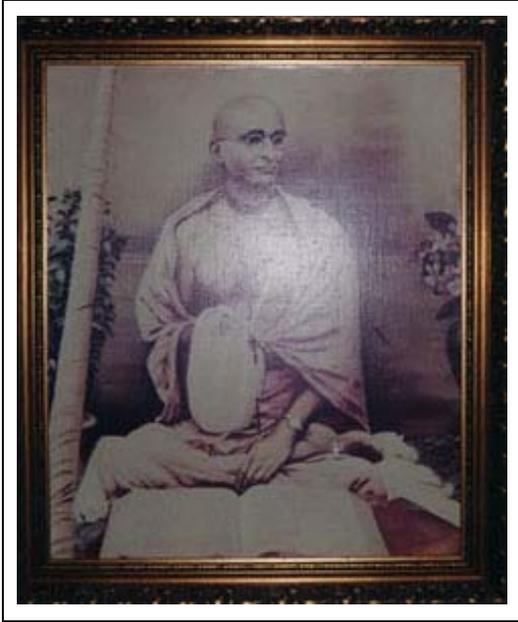
Upon entering the ritual space one must ring the bell on the doorway, or knock, and bow to the three-dimensional likeness of Swami Prabhupada (pictured below) at the shrine at the back of the temple, immediately to one's right or left dependent on which doorway they entered by. During Sunday services men enter from the rear left, and women from the rear right.



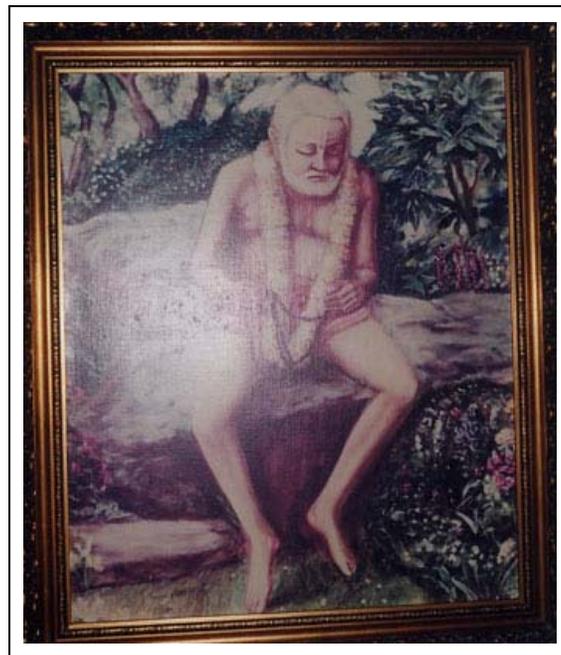
At the base of Swami Prabhupada's shrine is a gold-painted imprint of his feet and a framed picture of his hands (pictured next page). Devotees are free to offer flowers and garlands to Swami Prabhupada and to adorn his footprints with flower petals as a sign of adoration and love. This is reminiscent of the traditional Hindu practice of adorning the feet of a deity in order to demonstrate piety and love.



As previously mentioned, the eastern wall is lined with key figures of the early Krishna consciousness movement. Each man was a guru trained by a follower of Lord Chaitanya's philosophy and all are involved in the lineage of discipleship leading up to Srila Bhaktisiddanta Sarasvati Gosvami and then lastly to Srila Prabhupada. Pictured on the next page are the portraits of Srila Bhaktisiddanta Sarasvati Thakura (left) and Srila Gaurakisora Dasa Babaji Maharaja (right).



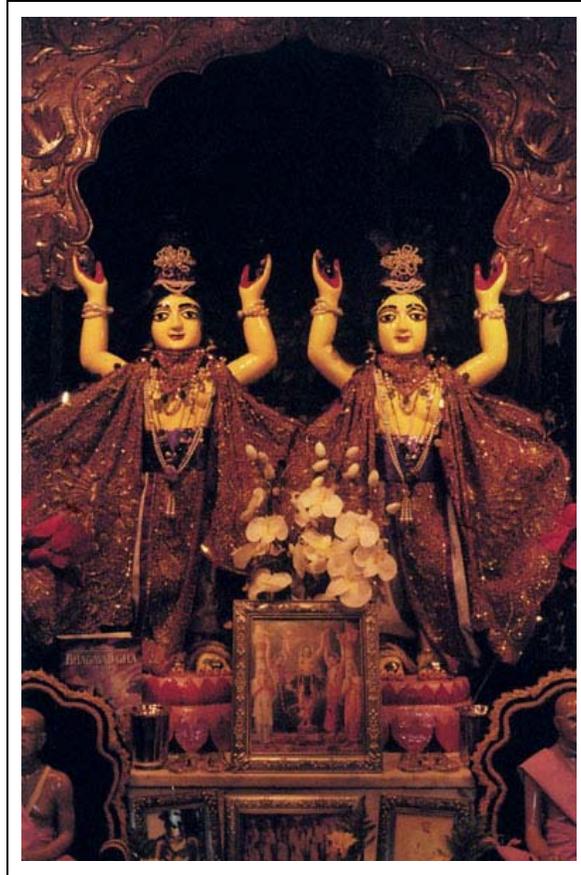
Lastly along the wall, on the farthest right hand side of Srila Prabhupada, there is a portrait of Srila Jagannatha Dasa Babaji Maharaja (picture at the top of page 18) who is said to have lived over to 140 years of age.



The floor is hardwood and the main directional focus is west. This is not doctrine, but a matter of convenience and room shape. Worship takes place barefoot on the floor, mostly standing, dancing and chanting, and sometimes bowing or sitting. The congregation faces the main altar, and the leader of the ceremony stands at the front of the congregation, also facing the main altar and chanting into a microphone. There is no set floor plan, but there is a clear division of men (on the left) and women (on the right) with the three-dimensional representation of Srila Prabhupada's sightline to the main altar acting as the dividing line between men and women. The main altar (pictured next page), situated to the west, displays a multitude of Krishna's forms including Gaura and Nitai, Krishna and Rhada, Jagannath, and Lord Caitanya. A number of Krishna's expansions such as Baladev, Subadra, and Swami Prabhupada are also present on the altar. There are three sections to the main altar, and each is facilitated with a fan and individual lighting. Each day the deities' clothes are changed, they are bathed, and offered prasada (food).



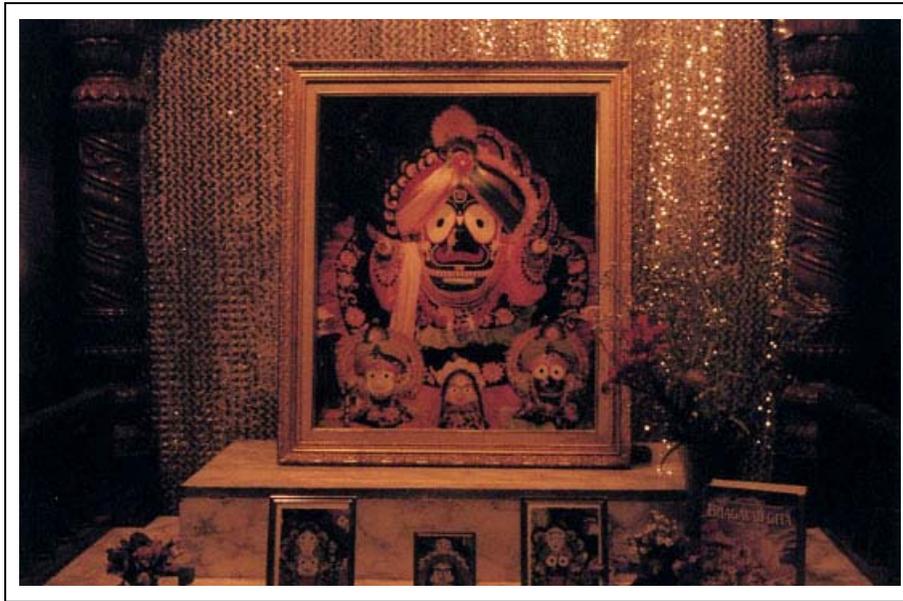
In the farthest left (south) part of the altar stand Nitai and Gaura (pictured next page). Nitai and Gaura represent Krishna in the aspect of a devotee. Gaura, also known as Lord Caitanya, is the form that Krishna took to understand the bliss and mood experienced by devotees. Nitai is the representation of revered practitioner of the time of Lord Caitanya, Lord Nityananda. Below them to the left is a miniature embodiment of Srila Prabhupada (pictured below), next to him are portraits of Lord Caitanya and his disciples. To the bottom right of Nitai and Gaura sits an icon of Srila Bhaktisiddanta Sarasvati Thakura (also pictured below).



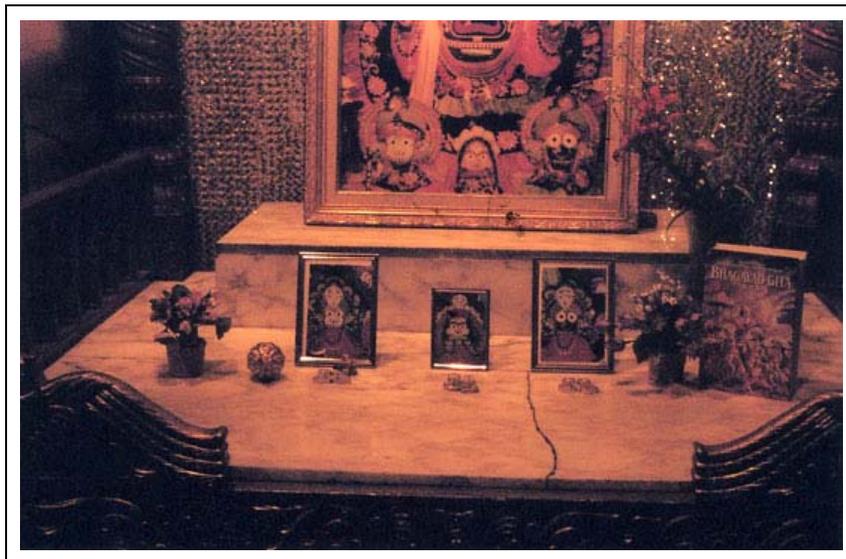
In the centre of the altar stands a large embodiment of Lord Krishna and Mother Radha (pictured below). Immediately below these two deities is a miniature embodiment of their forms (pictured below) and to the lower right of them is a figure of Nandi, Lord Shiva's bull (pictured below).



Lastly, to the farthest left of the altar are Juggernat, Baladev, and Subadra. Juggernat is the black-coloured deity in the large portrait (pictured below) and is also shown in the small portrait in the middle of the three immediately below his larger portrait (pictured next page). Baladev is the small white deity to the left, an incarnation of Krishna's elder brother, and he is also Krishna's first expansion. An expansion is a deity who shares the fundamental aspect of Krishna, but is not an incarnation of the Lord and subsequently has a different persona with whom Lord Krishna can interact. Subadra is the yellow deity to the right, an incarnation of Krishna's younger sister and she represents *yoga-maya*.



*Yoga-maya* is a form of *maya* (illusion) which descends from the spiritual world allowing Krishna to enjoy his past-times (experiences) in the human world, like those with the gopies. This *maya* is required to mask Krishna to the devotees so that they may interact with him without offending him or being overwhelmed by his true form. At the time of this photo Juggernat had "taken ill" after having been bathed in cold water and his return to good health was scheduled to coincide with the Ratha Yatra festival held in his honour at Parc Jeanne-Mance two weeks later.



## 2.2 Ritual Process

The leader of a Sunday evening worship, as previously mentioned, is either a longstanding member of the lay community, or one of the live-in devotees. For the ceremonies I attended, the leader was always a live-in devotee. Ceremonial dress is optional for lay people, but is not optional for the live-in Brahmacharis. The Brahmacharis wear a saffron coloured robe indicating that they are in training. Lay people are free to wear street clothing, though most women come dressed in formal saris.

The chanter for the service begins by addressing the audience and calling out to the deities for their blessings. At the beginning of the service the deities are behind a black curtain and once they have been called to and some chanting has taken place, the curtain is withdrawn and the congregation bows. Once this rather solemn moment has passed the worship ritual continues with about an hour of singing and dancing. The chanter calls out a prayer to the deities and over the loudspeaker, and the congregation responds either by repeating the chanter or with a premeditated reply. Throughout the service musical implements including bells, drums, symbols, thimbles, tambourines and horns are blown, tapped or beat. Fire, water, and floral oblations are offered to the deities by a devotee who stands inside the main altar. After each offering is made to the deity the same offering is brought by a devotee to each member of the congregation so that s/he may take a blessing from it. The chanting lasts for approximately 45 minutes at which point the congregation is seated and announcements are made.

The announcements give the congregation advanced notice of upcoming festivals like the Ratha Yatra festival in honour of Lord Juggernat. Upcoming Kirtans are also announced and all are invited to meet at the temple for transportation if the Kirtan is out of town. During the service that I attended there was to be a Kirtan in Ottawa on Canada Day, and the congregation was informed that a school bus had been rented for the occasion and that as many people as wanted to were welcome to join the envoy of devotees. After information for the Ratha Yatra festival was offered, volunteers were requested for a number of tasks: cars were requested to aid in the distribution of posters and leaflets, donations of food and money were also requested, and directions were given about who to speak to for volunteering on the day of the event. At the conclusion of the announcements the congregation split up for lectures: English in the main hall, and French in a room across from the main entranceway to the building and adjacent to the gift shop.

Each week a different subject matter is put forward as the base material for the lecture. As the Sunday service I attended was in honour of Bhaktivedanta Thakura, the lecture was a description of his life and his accomplishments. The lecture is framed more as a story telling rather, akin to a Church sermon. The past times of Thakura are explained and then their allegorical connection to the devotees present, the ways in which Thakura's model can be applied and followed are outlined, giving the lecture not a moralistic sense, but a rather personal and familiar feel. After the lecture, the devotees are invited to ask questions, and then all are invited upstairs to the dining hall (pictured below) for prasad.

Prasad, a Hindi word for mercy, is distributed in the form of food at every Hare Krishna event. In keeping with the Bhakti tradition which dictates that even eating is a sacrifice to God, prasad is food that has been blessed by Lord Krishna and can then be ingested as mercy travelling directly from God into the devotee. The food can only be cooked by Brahmacharis of longstanding, but is more often cooked by initiates to ensure that the food is of the highest quality in terms of the level of Krishna consciousness that was involved in its creation. All food is vegetarian and resembles traditional Indian dishes with the main staples being rice, potatoes and lentils. The food is hearty, healthy, and high in nutritional value. Food is served to devotees on silver trays, utensils are optional and most people take seats on the floor, but some prefer a seat at one of the few tables. Guests are never turned away, and the distribution of prasad is one of the most important functions of the service as it assures the blessings of Krishna will be bestowed upon anyone who eats.



### 2.3 Festivals

The festivals celebrated by the temple are numerous. The dates for festivals are not fixed, but change annually. The proximity between the holidays, however, is maintained. The following list is by no means exhaustive, but does give a very good outline of the celebrations one may partake in at the Montreal Temple:

- Radhashtami, the appearance day of Radharani dating back 5000 years. This the only festival in the Hare Krishna movement where gifts are exchanged.
- Baladev's appearance day.
- Janmashtami, the appearance day of Lord Krishna, is a celebration of his advent five thousand years ago. At this festival a few gifts are exchanged but unlike Radhashtami, there is a much larger celebration. The festival takes place two weeks after Baladev's appearance day. The festival goes through midnight, at which point the deities are greeted and the devotees break their 24 hour fast with prasadam.
- The very next day the arrival of Srila Prabhupada is celebrated in a festival called Vyasa Puja.
- Disappearance day of Srila Prabhupada, typically in November.
- Diphawali, festival of lights, based in the story of the Ramayana this festival celebrates the return of Lord Ramachandra from exile in the forest.
- The Month of Damodar also known as the Month of Karttik is a month-long festival where a special prayer is sung each night for Lord Damodar. The festival is in commemoration of the childhood past-times of Lord Krishna.
- Appearance Day of Lord Nityananda (Nitai)
- Gaura Purnima, (the full moon of Lord Gaura). Occurring one month after the appearance day of Lord Nityananda, the day of the appearance of Lord Caitanya (Lord Gaura) is celebrated. On this day all ISKCON devotees are invited to Mayapur, the birthplace of Lord Caitanya to celebrate. Special classes, Kirtans, and prasadam including a cake are offered at the temple for those who can't afford the flight to India.
- The Jhulan Yatra, is a celebration of Radha and Krishna's pleasurable past times spent together. A small swing is built for the deities, and each morning and evening they are swung to commemorate the past happiness.

- Appearance day of Lord Nrisinghadev, commemorates Lord Vishnu's appearance as half-lion and half-human in a story when he was forced to save a devotee.
- Ratha Yatra, festival of Lord Juggernat.
- The day of appearance of Sri Sri Radha Manohar, this festival is site-specific to the Montreal temple as the deity is the patron deity for this site.
- Panihati, the name of a village in India where, approximately 500 years ago, the past times of Lord Nityananda (Lord Nitai) took place. The festival is celebrated by a kirtan at a riverside and a distribution of flat rice and yogurt to passersby.
- Smaller festivals are held throughout the year for special Vaisnavs, devotees whose past times are of great importance or special significance.

### 3.0 Doctrine and Beliefs

The Doctrines and Beliefs of ISKCON are based upon traditional Vaisnavism. Swami Prabhupada claimed that he had made no new regulations or beliefs, but had only communicated what was already written in the Bhagavad-gita. This is, for the most part, almost completely accurate. Outside of the movement's devotion to Prabhupada as a spiritual leader, the Hare Krishna movement and its practices strongly resemble the sectarian form of Hinduism that stems directly from the teachings of Lord Caitanya in the 1600's.

#### 3.1 Formal and Informal

At the back of every Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (the book company setup and owned by ISKCON) publication there is a section entitled "An Introduction to ISKCON And Devotee Lifestyle." In a space of 16 pages the chapter explains what ISKCON is how it grew as a religion; what the history behind it is; who Lord Caitanya was; how to begin to focus on the spiritual life at home; how to chant the Hare Krishna mantra; how to setup an altar in your home; how to correctly follow the vegetarian diet required by the movement; how to prepare and offer that food to God and to others; how to pray to Srila Prabhupada; how to pray to Krishna; four regulatory principles to follow in order to maintain a healthy mind and body; the necessity of engaging in devotional service by ensuring that your job is not a sinful one and that all of your activities are in the name of Krishna; and finally the section ends by reinforcing the devotional principles of studying the Hare Krishna literature and associating with devotees in order to create a support network that will last for one's lifetime. The section, though not completely in-depth, offers an excellent set of guidelines to any devotee wishing either to find out about the movement, or to become completely immersed in it.

As previously explained, the main purpose of the movement is to "promote the well-being of human society by teaching the science of God consciousness (Krishna consciousness) according to the timeless Vedic scriptures of India" (*Dharma The Way of Transcendence* 110). The Hare Krishna movement understands Krishna to be the "Supreme Personality of Godhead," the same God mentioned in *The Bible* and in the *Qu'ran*, but in his highest form as explained in the *Bhagavad-gita*. In this way the Hare Krishna religion is not an abandonment of one God for another, but a choice to worship the One God in his/her most supreme form. The belief is simple: anyone can take part in the practical process of self-realization and spiritual awakening if they simply chant the Hare Krishna mantra and read and follow the precepts of the *Bhagavad-gita*.

The first step in the process of becoming a devotee is to convert one's daily habits into sacrifices for Krishna. This process means changing the motivation behind our actions from materialistic to spiritualistic. Hence, when we work, we should work for Krishna and not to make money. When we eat, we should eat as a sacrifice to Krishna and not to satisfy personal hungers or desires for delicate tastes. One should try to make one's home a temple to Krishna by following the precepts in the *Gita*, by chanting the mantras on a daily basis, by committing time to reading and learning about the *Gita*, and by focusing on spiritual knowledge as the highest form of knowing and the most important type of study. One should also setup an altar in their home as a focal point for prayer and worship. When a devotee sets up an altar s/he is "receiving the Lord and his Pure devotees as [his/her] most honoured guests" (*Dharma* 116). The basic requirements for a home altar are: a space where one can comfortably face and enjoy the beings on the altar, a picture of Srila Prabhupada, a picture of Lord Caitanya and His associates, and a picture of Sri Sri Radha-Krishna (*Dharma* 117). Once the altar is setup, one should undertake to learn about each of the beings on the altar and then should devote time each day to prayer and japa (beads).

The next step in converting one's home into a temple is to learn how to convert one's eating into a sacrifice to God, or Krishna prasadam which means the "mercy of Lord Krishna." This practice is a form of bhakti-yoga, devotional worship, and is intended, as with all ISKCON practices, to alter the intention behind the experience of eating. Rather than merely satisfying human hunger, the food becomes an offering to God and the process of digestion a sacrifice to God. Foods that are not acceptable as

sacrifices are meat, fish, eggs, garlic, onions, tea, coffee (or any beverage containing caffeine) or any derivatives of these foods. One should effort to eat food cooked by devotees so that the intention behind the food is for, and the preparation is directed at, Krishna. Prior to eating there are three prayers which must be recited: one to Srila Prabhupada, one to Lord Caitanya, and one to Lord Krishna. Alongside the guidelines for eating, one final reminder is that any food one prepares is invested with the blessing and mercy of Krishna, so one should effort not to throw anything away and should also venture to distribute food to anyone who will eat it, so that they too may become blessed. The distribution of prasadam is an important aspect of the Hare Krishna belief system and is understood to be an effective and necessary part of worship.

In order to maintain one's focus on spiritual matters while dealing with the world at large, ISKCON offers "The Four Regulative Principles" or the four basic things to avoid in order to live a holy life. One should avoid eating meat, fish, or eggs; one should never gamble; one should not use intoxicants such as alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, or other controlled substances; and one should never engage in sex outside of marriage, and sex in marriage should be for no other purpose than procreation. By these four guidelines, one can ensure that their actions are non-offensive to God and are also constantly sculpting a higher level of God-consciousness by dint of being conscious of one's habits.

The final three recommendations are quite simple: engage in devotional service (act for Krishna), study Hare Krishna literature, and associate with devotees. The first guidelines dictates that unless one is a bartender, drug dealer, butcher, or other sinful worker, then changing one's job is unnecessary, one must only change the motivation: "If you're a writer, write for Krishna; if you're an artist, create for Krishna; if you're a secretary, type for Krishna" (*Dharma* 124). Secondly, one must try to set some time every day to hearing the words and partaking in the wisdom that Srila Prabhupada has offered the world via his books and recordings; in order to cultivate a spiritual mind, one must fill one's mind with spiritual matters. Lastly one should try to visit the ISKCON centre nearest them as often as possible, enriching one's belief by surrounding oneself with believers. "Conversely, maintaining intimate connections with non-devotees slows one's spiritual progress" (*Dharma* 125) and so one should make every effort to befriend and maintain relations with as many devotees as possible.

One final principle, as quoted from the *Bhagavad-gita* (2.40), "There is no loss or diminution in this endeavor, and even a little advancement on this path protects one from the most fearful type of danger." Hence, the movement makes clear in its literature and by its doctrines that one should only take on as much change as one feels they are ready for. The process can be gradual or sudden, but the honing of spiritual knowledge should be a lifelong venture.

#### 4.0 Analysis and Reflection

The Hare Krishna Movement offers an interesting glimpse at the phenomenon of a sectarian tradition when abetted by a charismatic leader. The basic rule being that the more sectarian the religion the more exclusive. The Hare Krishna movement by merit of what Max Weber called "charisma" in its leadership has succeeded in carrying its message across the globe in a very short period of time. Even if one is unfamiliar with the specific doctrines of the movement, almost everyone in the Western world has encountered or is aware of the Hare Krishnas.

The religion, being a sectarian one, is very exclusive in its worshipping of Krishna as the highest Divine form. The practitioners both the live-in devotees and the community who attend Sunday services make no qualms about following the tradition of Vaisnavite Hinduism and of chanting only to Krishna and not to Shiva or Vishnu. Though the clientele is highly diverse, the temple seems to be able to focus all attention to the worship of God and away from any differences of worldview. In the temple, all are devotees of Krishna and the focus is the worship of God and glorification of God.

The religion is a proselytizing one, which takes its message to the street and to the public on a regular basis. Though often criticized for this habit, in truth the movement is a young one, preaching to an audience not yet entirely familiar with its message. Much like any missionary religion, the ISKCON movement sees its message as universally applicable and universally beneficial. Part of being a Hare Krishna is to share the blessing of the Lord with as many people as possible. By chanting the Holy Name devotees hope that the reverberations will bless all those who come into contact with the sound. It is under the pretence of trying to extend mercy and God-consciousness to the world that the Hare Krishnas take to the streets chanting in public places and offering books to anyone willing to read them.

The Hare Krishna movement does not encourage violence, or forced conversions of any sort. Furthermore it makes clear that people who are curious about its practices should undertake the changes of habit in slow and deliberate steps, so as to ensure the highest yield of experience from each procession toward spiritual enlightenment. The religion makes itself amenable to as many people as possible by offering food, books, and housing to anyone wishing to become a devotee. All are welcome at mealtimes and all are welcome to pray during the weekdays, to attend the evening lectures, and to worship at the Sunday services. By maintaining an open-door policy, the Hare Krishna movement offers the freedom of choice to its devotees: they are free to come and participate at whatever level they feel comfortable with, and they are also free to leave at any time.

One of the benefits to the singular non-syncretic nature of the religion is that it does not leave itself open to criticisms of inconsistency in doctrine or focus. The religion constantly refers back to the *Bhagavad-gita* as the source text for all knowledge and for all of its doctrines. The *Gita*, being one of the most famous and revered religious texts in the world, is unlikely to be discredited or regarded as "new-wave" material. In this way the Hare Krishna movement, though a new one in the West and definitely in a young format as the *International Society for Krishna Consciousness*, situates itself in a longstanding tradition, and aligns itself with a large, pre-existing, base of practitioners: namely Vaisnavite Hindus. The religion that Srila Prabhupada preached was one that had existed in India for as long as the cultural-communal memory of that area of the world can remember. In accordance with this, he made clear that he was not offering the world anything new, but bringing an old Vedic message from its Sanskrit origins into as many languages and to as many countries as possible. The existence and continued growth of the ISKCON movement asserts that Srila Prabhupada's goal of exposing as many people to Krishna's mercy as possible is precisely what continues to occur as a result of his having brought the message to the West only 40 years ago.

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