

Enjoyment and the Environment



This pamphlet is presented to you by the Hare Krishna movement, part of the greater Vaishnava culture, which thrives predominantly in South Asia, Southeast Asia, North America, and the U.K.

To learn more about the Krishna organizations and their contribution to the environment, visit SaveEarthNow.info.

The Krishna movement seeks to inform the public, make friends, and recruit activists.

A person in the West consumes and wastes between 15-30 times more than the average Vaishnava.

One could say that Americans, Europeans, and Australians are greedier than Vaishnavas; however, that is not a helpful perspective. It is more useful to look at how Vaishnavas enjoy life—what makes them satisfied to consume less.

In general, Westerners are entrapped in a type of enjoyment that causes them to overconsume and destroy the environment.

Many believe environmental issues can be solved through technology, government mandates, better investment strategies, and restrictions on corporations. Those solutions are indeed necessary, but they aren't effective on their own.

Businesses, economies, and even governments depend on how the public enjoys life. And people can only be expected to curb their consumption, live simpler lives, and reduce their carbon footprint when they can offset such disciplines with other types of happiness.

In this pamphlet, we present alternatives to enjoyment that is unhealthy for the planet. We urge you to take a careful look at those alternatives and seek enjoyment that is good for you as well as the environment in which we live.

We need to look at the way we enjoy life.

Enjoyment that Elevates

Three types of enjoyment

The ancient *Bhagavad Gita*, or simply *Gita*, describes three levels of worldly enjoyment—degrading, selfish, and elevating.¹ And there are effectively infinite combinations of those three.

Enjoyment of drugs is an example of degrading enjoyment.

Selfish enjoyment is achieved by exploiting others and nature. It's characterized by attachment to immediate gratification, which results in longer term suffering.

¹ *Bhagavad Gita* (BG) 18.37-39

The third, or highest level of worldly enjoyment, elevates oneself and others. It's selfless and requires discipline in the beginning, but it brings about long-term satisfaction.

The *Gita* also describes a form of enjoyment that is more refined and even less exploitative than those three.² That is pleasure or joy



1 Pillar erected in 113 BC in praise of Krishna by the Greek ambassador Heliodorus.

that transcends or goes beyond this world.

Modern culture has an abundance of the first two, which results in self-destruction and degradation of the environment. The highest forms are not absent, but their influence is weak.

Vaishnava Culture

In contrast, for thousands of years, enjoyment that doesn't harm others or the environment has sustained Vaishnava culture.

Such pleasure elevates society.

² BG 2.59, 5.21, 6.21, 6.27, 9.2

The term *Vaishnava* means centered on Vishnu, who is the Supreme. And the *Bhagavad Gita* is the best place to find the basic values of that culture.

Those values include: identifying oneself and all other beings as soul, not the body; seeking unification with the Supreme; and being detached from a world of suffering.

Modern Values and Vaishnava Values

Modern culture imbibes values and perspectives that are inherited from many sources.

Two of the most destructive are derived from religion:

The first is that human life is considered superior to the lives or souls of all other beings. Even those who do not profess themselves religious, like socialists and the scientific community, have inherited this faith-based view.

The other religious value that pervades modern culture is the idea that humans have the right to exploit nature and kill or destroy parts of it as they desire.³

Alternatively, Vaishnavas see the equality of all life or souls. It's illogical to think that one form of life has the right to consume another without restriction. By observing nature, one can see that, aside from humans, no species can exploit without constraints.

Thus, the logical and natural conclusion is that all souls are equal, and humans do not have the right to consume beyond necessity.

***For thousands of years, the Vaishnava culture
has been sustained by enjoyment that
doesn't harm others or the environment.***

³ *Science, New Series*, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," Lynn White, Jr.
<https://bit.ly/2v3k0Ia>

Vaishnava Worldly Enjoyment

Much of the *Gita* describes ancient analyses of society, nature, and the universe. It also presents perspectives on how humans can exist and maintain a balanced life in their environment.

One important concept introduced early in the text is that enjoyment is based on economies.⁴ In other words, people earn money and, aside from purchasing necessities, use it to enjoy life. Thus, societies evolve economies that facilitate the two: necessities and enjoyment.

As mentioned above, there are three types of enjoyment. When economies are focused on just the selfish and degrading forms, society suffers.



2 Painting of the ancient Rathayatra festival by James Fergusson (1808-1886).

⁴ BG 3.10-16

Those in the Vaishnava culture, however, enjoy redirecting their money and harvest away from selfish consumption to higher purposes, like charity, good deeds, and supporting renunciants, who are examples of detachment from consumption.

Vaishnavas derive satisfaction working for success, not by acquiring more money and status, but through individual and social elevation.

They enjoy focusing inward towards the soul rather than outward towards the world of greed and dissipation.

Young Vaishnavas are taught that detachment from possessions is a positive and pleasurable state. And throughout their lives, they maintain the idea that such detachment is indeed enjoyable.

Transcendental Enjoyment

For a culture to be properly sustained and uplifted, transcendental enjoyment must predominate.

Transcendental enjoyment is based on the life force—the soul, the essence—not the external world that fosters greed, division, prejudice, and hatred. Such enjoyment seeks to leave behind any tinge of selfishness.

The highest forms of entertainment and enjoyment in Vaishnava culture are associated with *lilas* and divine names,⁵ which find their expression in art, architecture, worship, festivals, music, drama, dance, and more.

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⁵ See the following two sections for definitions of *lila* and divine names.

Lila

In Sanskrit, *lila* (leela) means play, sport, pastime, or drama.⁶ Traditionally, it refers to the dramas that are enacted by an incarnation of the Supreme.

Vaishnavas embrace the concept that the creator appears within His creation to assist in its maintenance. When the gods or humans have serious trouble, the Supreme may appear at His will.⁷



3 *The great Chaitanya Mahāprabhu (1486-1534) enjoying Krishna's lilas and names.*

⁶ *Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, <https://bit.ly/2P7VNt7>

⁷ *Srimad Bhagavatam* (SB) 1.1.18, 1.2.34, 1.16.8, 2.2.36, and 11.5.32; BG 4.7

However, His appearance and activities are not just meant to aid humanity during difficulty but are also a chance for Him to enjoy Himself through enacting a role within His own drama.

Thus, His *lilas* are characterized by victory and joy. For example, Krishna, who is Vishnu, was victorious over many opponents. But beyond His supreme displays of heroism, He demonstrated transcendental joy through friendly, filial, and conjugal love.

Vaishnavas enjoy grand celebrations honoring His *lilas* and those of Vishnu. Such festivities are joyful reminders that life is not meant for selfish pursuits.

Instead of focusing on consumption of material goods, Vaishnavas enjoy public and private festivals,⁸ parades, home worship, temple worship, renunciation, devotion, cultivation of transcendental knowledge, food distribution, and so on—all with the aim of pleasing Vishnu or Krishna.

The idea is that giving pleasure is the best way of receiving it. And by watering the root of creation, who is Vishnu or Krishna, the branches and leaves—that is, all beings—become satisfied.

Throughout history, the Vaishnava people have enjoyed dance,⁹ drama,¹⁰ music, art, sculpture, architecture, science, and literature that have focused on *lilas*.

Divine Names

Divine names, or names of Vishnu, also permeate the culture. They are present within nearly all conversation as salutations, festivals, daily life, worship, and more. They are integrally connected

⁸ An important celebration of one of Krishna's *lilas* is Rathayatra, which originated in ancient Jagannath Puri and is now celebrated in most major cities of the world.

⁹ Indian regional dances are displays of Krishna and Vishnu *lilas*.

¹⁰ Throughout South and Southeast Asia dramas, puppet shows, paintings and sculptures demonstrate *lilas* from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and *Puranas*.

to the *lilas*. Indeed, most divine names invoke remembrance of a specific *lila*.¹¹

There are thousands of such names. Since the Supreme is absolute, His names and *lilas* are identical with Him. Like Him, they are on the absolute level. And by uttering His names, one invokes the company or association of the Supreme. He dances on the tongue.

His name appears in common greetings like Jai Ram, Hare Krishna, Haribol, and Narayana.

Many recite a thousand names of Vishnu daily. Others chant Krishna, Ram, or Narayana thousands of times a day.¹²

Thus, in Vaishnava culture, transcendental enjoyment is expressed through celebration of Vishnu's or Krishna's names and *lilas*.¹³

Certainly not all Vaishnavas enjoy on the same high level, and they don't represent a utopian society; however, transcendental enjoyment



4 Nineteenth century Vaishnava village scene.

prevails, serves to uplift society, and enables it to flourish in relative harmony with nature.

Indeed, their 300 million are doing a far better job at respecting

¹¹ Some names, out of thousands that are associated with *lilas*, are Nrsimha (half-man half-lion), Vamana (dwarf), Madhusudana (killer of Madhu), Brajendra-nandana (beloved son of the King of Braj), and Syama (blackish).

¹² Of all mantras, the greatest is Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

¹³ *Sri Sri Siksastakam*, 1-8; SB 6.2.46, 6.3.31, 2.1.11, 11.5.32, BG 4.7

and preserving nature than 330 million Americans whose worldwide influence of exploitation and greed has already caused serious harm to the planet.

In that way, the Vaishnava culture has the practical solution to environmental disaster—enjoyment that elevates. It's a proven solution.

And Vaishnava enjoyment can be adopted by modern societies around the world.

A change in the way modern people enjoy life must be adopted. Otherwise, societies are doomed to consume and destroy all the resources the earth has to offer.

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Bhagavad Gita

The Gita and Vaishnava Culture

Krishna's teachings in the *Gita* contain solutions to environmental disturbances caused by humans.

For 5,000 years the *Bhagavad Gita* has represented the Vaishnava culture. Moreover, it's impossible to divorce it from the entire Indian experience. An example of this is that Tilak and Gandhi, two pre-WWII politicians, in their quest for independence from Britain, wrote commentaries on the *Gita*. Doing so was an attempt to demonstrate to their constituents that they had mastery over the culture.

The *Gita* molds the values and mentality of the people. Whether or not they regularly study it, they've been raised and shaped by its

ideals. Thus, those in the Vaishnava culture, and even those outside but influenced by it, are naturally more inclined to respect nature and the environment than those in modern, post-industrial cultures.

For example, most Vaishnavas are vegetarian. Their thinking is that all living beings have souls. Thus, a human has no right to take the life of another creature. Meat eating consumes immense amounts of water, land, and energy resources; thus, Vaishnavas conserve those resources. Moreover, Vaishnavas don't endanger animal species by hunting them to extinction.

About 50 percent of Vaishnavas live in agrarian settings. In general, they believe that a simple, non-materialistic life will be good for their progress in this life and the next.

Those are just some of the practical influences of the *Gita*. Everyone should read the *Gita* to understand those influences.



5 Vegetarian food sanctified by being offered to Krishna for His enjoyment.

The Gita's Solution to Greed

The *Gita's* perspective on greed is particularly relevant to the environment. Krishna teaches that the body is designed around five knowledge-acquiring senses—seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and

smelling—along with five working senses—tongue, arms, legs, genitals, and anus. And the mind is supposed to control those senses.

The problem is that the senses are uncontrollably attracted to the objects of the world. And that attraction fosters worldly enjoyment.

Although such enjoyment may seem desirable, it is temporary, illusory, and often degrading. Thus, it's false enjoyment, resulting in greed. True enjoyment—transcendental enjoyment—may be experienced by one who rises above the magnetism of the sense objects and contacts the soul. Such enjoyment is required to control greed.

There have been many translations and commentaries on the Gita. However, the best one is Bhagavad Gita As It Is by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

Gita Perspectives and Practices

The *Gita* prescribes methods for connecting with the soul.

Again, the mind is supposed to be in control of the senses, but in fact, the worldly predicament is that the senses have subjugated the mind.

For the mind to regain control over the senses, transcendental enjoyment must replace sense enjoyment. And to obtain such enjoyment, there must be practical means to do so.

The *Gita* details such means. It is not a work of history or religious sentiment. The *Gita* is analytical and thought provoking.

It systematically unfolds a science in the true sense of the word—knowledge. It analyzes work or occupation, money derived from occupations, social order, universal order, psychology, knowledge, devotion, character, godliness, and more.

And the *Gita* indicates that all this analysis can be reduced to one essence—enjoyment of the *lilas* and names of the Supreme.¹⁴

Adopting the sciences presented in the *Gita* will bring about a tremendous change in humanity’s relationship with Nature. And that is not a theoretical idea, nor has it proven itself on a small scale. Hundreds of millions demonstrate the effectiveness of this culture.

The Gita Commentary by Prabhupada

There have been many translations and commentaries on the *Gita*; however, the best one is *Bhagavad Gita As It Is* by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896-1977), whose teachings have affected millions throughout the world.

Prabhupada derives his comments from those of the traditional Vaishnava scholars, including Baladeva (1700-1793), Visvanatha (1626-1708), Madhva (1238-1317), and Ramanuja (1017-1137).

Prabhupada presents the perspective of those Vaishnava greats in a contemporary context. Thus, his *Gita* allows modern people to

understand and adopt the essence of Vaishnava culture.

In that way, his presentation is not just a literary or spiritual one. He translates the ancient *Gita*, which lies at the heart of a culture, into the cultural language of today.



6 Krishna and Arjuna blow their conch horns.

¹⁴ *Bhagavad Gita*, 10.9

Evidence of this fact is that his followers have worked hard for more than half a century to integrate Vaishnava culture into today's societies.

Those followers have established urban and rural communities, vegetarian restaurants, charitable food distribution, schools, colleges, university research centers, schools of art, sculpture, drama, and much more.

All of those imbibe the values of the *Gita*. And at their core they represent the enjoyment of *lila* and divine names—that is, transcendental enjoyment.

Conclusion

Our habits—the way we enjoy—must change to avoid environmental chaos.

Vaishnava culture and the *Bhagavad Gita* have important lessons to teach us about enjoyment. And we can adopt those aspects of the culture without compromising our own.

In addition to the ways we currently attempt to preserve nature, let's take a closer look at an entire society—hundreds of millions of people—whose joy does not cause such a destructive impact. Let's find more natural, elevating enjoyment for ourselves, our families, and our communities!

***Our habits—the way we enjoy—must
change to avoid environmental chaos.***

Learn more: read the *Gita* featured on the back cover. And support the Krishna movement in its attempts to improve our earth.

BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ AS IT IS



HIS DIVINE GRACE
A. C. BHAKTIVEDANTA SWAMI PRABHUPĀDA
Founder-Ācārya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness

This book, along with many others, is offered to the public by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (see krishna.com). The society, with over 600 centers around the world, was founded by Prabhupada, whose teachings continue to guide the society.

With over ten million hardbound copies in print in over fifty languages, *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* is the best-selling and most authoritative edition of this classic world literature.

Dr. S. Shukla, Assistant Professor of Linguistics, Georgetown University:
“*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* is a deeply felt, powerfully conceived and beautifully explained work.... I have never seen any other work on the *Gīta* with such an important voice and style. It is a work of undoubted integrity.... It will occupy a significant place in the intellectual and ethical life of modern man for a long time to come.”