

BHAKTI YOGA

TALES AND TEACHINGS FROM
THE BHĀGAVATA PURĀṆA

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Śrī Śrī Kṛṣṇa-Balarāmābhyāṃ namaḥ

In honor and dear remembrance of my father, George Bryant, MBE, for exemplifying *dharma* long before I encountered the concept in Sanskrit texts. I spent much time in his company as I worked on this text. May he partake of any merit accruing from this work.

To my daughter, Mohinī, in case one day she ever wonders what this piece of her upbringing was really all about.

To my sister, Pia, for all her love and support, that she may gain a clearer understanding of *bhakti yoga*. To Hannah Jackson, in case she ever becomes interested. And to all seekers interested in knowing more about the spirituality associated with the mischievous, lotus-eyed blue boy.

To my teachers and to all the *bhāgavatas* who have recorded, preserved, transmitted, and taught the wonderful *līlās* of *Bhagavān* across the ages. May they accept this little attempt to follow in their footsteps and smile with kindness and good humor at all its imperfections.

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Introduction to the Volume

Statement of Purpose: Sources and Scope of the Volume

There are as many variegated expressions of *bhakti yoga* in India as there are sects, languages, communities, lineages, castes, regions, villages, and, indeed, human hearts wherein it ultimately resides. This book is focused on one expression of *bhakti*: *Vaiṣṇava bhakti* centered on Śrī Kṛṣṇa as emerges in a sixteenth-century tradition. In this section, we discuss our vision and method for the volume and provide some rationale and contextual background for the texts on *bhakti* that we have chosen to feature. Our discussion in this introductory section may be mildly academic, but we have made every effort in the remainder of the volume to avoid scholarly language and specialized jargon in preference for straightforward prose and concepts accessible for the educated but nonspecialized reader. In this work, we attempt to navigate that unattainable line between producing something that is academically respectable, accessible to the interested nonspecialist, and useful to the intellectually responsible *yoga* practitioner. Since this is an impossible feat, I can only beg the indulgence both of scholars, who may find some of the discussion overly simplistic, and of lay readers, whether personally involved with *yoga* practices or not, who may find it too academic in places. In any event, anyone not interested in this section's technicalities might prefer to proceed to the next section, "Definition of *Bhakti*," where we begin our actual discussion on *bhakti* proper.

Specifically, the tales and teachings in part 2 of this volume are

translations from the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the *Beautiful Legend of Bhagavān* [God] (henceforth *Bhāgavata*), as are the stories of Kṛṣṇa in part 3. After much deliberation, we have chosen the translation “legend” here for the Sanskrit term *purāṇa*,¹ with the intention of denoting traditional lore, which presents itself as factual history, is purported to be true by its followers, and has been handed down and believed as such by its adherents across the centuries.² The *Bhāgavata* is, as we will suggest later, arguably one of the most important texts on *bhakti yoga*, along with the *Rāmāyaṇa*, in that cluster of traditions that has come to be known as “Hinduism.”³ In addition to the text itself, the systematic analysis of *bhakti yoga*, which will occupy the bulk of part 1, will to a great extent be from the perspective of the commentaries and elaborations on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* written by the sixteenth-century theologians Jīva Gosvāmī and his uncle Rūpa Gosvāmī, two of the founding fathers of the Gauḍīya school of Vaiṣṇavism (also known as Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism).⁴ We will introduce these sources below. While we will engage a wide variety of other intellectual and theological expressions in India both prior and contemporary to the sixteenth century, our motive will be to compare and contrast these with our chosen case study.

Our aim in this volume is to provide the reader with a modest window into how *bhakti* is understood through the frame of reference of one community of practitioners in the premodern period. Our interest in this book is in the theology of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*—the beliefs, metaphysics, devotional attitudes, and, most especially, *yogic* practices of this tradition—considered through the tradition’s own categories and terminologies as presented by its adherents.⁵ We will be directing considerable attention to the soteriological goals of the *Bhāgavata* tradition (“soteriology” is a term used to refer to the nature of religious beliefs pertaining to some sort of perfected afterlife—in the Indic⁶ context, *mokṣa*, the liberated state). This is a book intended for anyone with intellectual inclinations interested in exploring an expression of *bhakti* as a lived reality—as a map of how to navigate one’s existence in

this world, frame its ultimate meaning, and conceive of that which lies beyond.

For my academic colleagues, I feel obliged to point out that this is not an analysis of the social, political, or ideological contexts of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, nor of the material influences that fed into its historical development—concerns that have come to dominate and, in fact, more or less define the study of religion as an academic discipline.⁷ These are all essential aspects of the study of any religion, as no tradition, howsoever spiritual, exists in a cultural vacuum, immune from being affected by its sociopolitical environment and devoid of any ideology of its own. But such contexts and agendas will not concern us here. Thus, while our critics may accuse us of naive ahistoricism (that is, extracting a tradition from its historical setting in the real world), we wish to be clear from the outset: our focus is on the theology and practices of a tradition as conceptualized and articulated in the terms and categories of the tradition itself.⁸ (I have placed further comments pertaining to how I am framing this work in notes so as not to burden this introduction.)⁹

We thus prioritize premodern traditional sources in this volume (but we have included references to select academic studies in notes). Our hope is that this focus affords an opportunity to glimpse one facet of the traditional Hindu universe of *bhakti* in India as expressed in a very important classical text¹⁰ and a major commentarial tradition prior to its encounter with modernity in the colonial period. Our aim is for scholars and students of religion to gain some understanding of the worldview and principal beliefs of the Kṛṣṇa *bhakta* practitioner of this tradition, and for intellectually responsible *yoga* practitioners to get a better sense of the premodern rationale of a form of *bhakti* as a very specific type of *yoga* practice. As a result of our chosen focus, in addition to engaging an important *bhakti* text, by an exposure to a traditional mode of understanding, interpreting, and reworking sacred scripture (hermeneutics), via Jīva and Rūpa's commentarial writings and interpretations of the *Bhāgavata*, we will explore how an elaborate and sophisticated *bhakti* tradition sets about gaining authenticity for its

teachings. Foundational texts such as the *Bhāgavata* in ancient India are almost always studied through the lineage-based commentaries that are written to clarify them, as well as to establish a sect's theological credentials.

Our contention is that there is much that is shared, in both form and experience, in the overlapping but distinct traditions of *bhakti*, and that revealing the worldview and ingredients of one tradition in some depth provides a basic template that can readily be refitted and applied to other expressions, despite important differences. If we analogize “Hinduism” as a universe containing numerous distinct but also significantly overlapping and interacting galaxies, with specific devotional traditions analogous to constellations, then awareness of the constitution and orbits of one constellation provides invaluable information relevant to other constellations, despite important differences. There is thus merit in exploring one *bhakti* universe with some profundity, rather than superficially attempting to cover the entire panoramic multifarious breadth of the vast spectrum of Hindu devotional traditions. Exposure to the metaphysical infrastructure, theological vision, set of practices, mental cultivations, and devotional depths of one tradition provides a useful blueprint that can be readily compared with others.

A further comment here on method: As is obvious from the cover designs, this work was conceived as a follow-up to the author's commentary on the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali. The rationale for that work, given the massive transplantation to the West of practices that have been assigned the name *yoga*, was to attempt to provide some grounding of the actual metaphysics, goals, and practices of classical *yoga* in their most prominent, premodern textual sources. This present project is motivated by similar intentions with regard to grounding *bhakti*. The difference in this work is that owing to the variegation in the *bhakti* traditions, we have focused principally on one lineage-specific expression of *bhakti*. The premodern Patañjali-derived Yoga tradition does not present the same heterogeneity as *bhakti*: there are no distinct

lineages that derive from Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*,¹¹ but rather an essentially fairly homogeneous commentarial Yoga tradition, all predicated on the first commentary on the text by Vyāsa, usually dated to around the third century.¹² Because of the canonical nature of Vyāsa, the later primary commentators—such as Vācaspati Miśra, Śaṅkara, Bhoja Rāja, Vijñānabhikṣu, and others—build on and expand on their predecessors, they do not disagree on essential points. Any differences are relatively minor.¹³ So we can speak of a fairly consistent “Yoga tradition” without overly generalizing or essentializing (that is, sharing the same Sāṅkhya metaphysics, understanding of mind and of consciousness, set of practices, and the like).

This is not the case with *bhakti*. Just to give a preview of a couple of topics that lie ahead to make this point, *bhakti* is both central to the Vedānta philosophical traditions and to the Purāṇa literary ones. Ontology is the term used in philosophy to refer to the ultimate basic categories of reality (for example, in a typical monotheistic ontology: God, the world of matter, and souls), and there are fundamental differences among Vedānta lineages on essential ontological categories. To name just one we will engage later, is *Īśvara*, God, who is the recipient of *bhakti yoga*, the Ultimate Absolute Truth or a secondary one derived from some higher and even more Ultimate Truth? And there are differences just as significant in the Purāṇas, such as, for our purposes, whether Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu, or Śiva is the ultimate source *Īśvara*, with the other divinities secondary or derivative manifestations from this source *Īśvara*. We will, of course, expound on all this in great detail within, but we touch on this now simply to note that it is because of such significant heterogeneity on basic issues pertaining to *bhakti* that we have chosen to enter deeply into one *bhakti* tradition, rather than go broad and superficially attempt to cover multiple traditions. However, we will exemplify our featured tradition through comparisons with others, and hence there will be frequent references to predecessor and contemporary traditions of *bhakti*, especially those of *advaita Vedānta*, Śiva, and other Viṣṇu expressions.

This work is divided into five parts. Part 1 sets out to provide an analytic map of what constitutes the various principal ingredients of *bhakti*. Here, we primarily follow Jīva Gosvāmī’s systematic exposition on the *bhakti* of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as expressed in his *Bhakti Sandarbha* (*Analysis of Bhakti*). We also significantly engage Rūpa Gosvāmī’s works on *bhakti yoga*, specifically the first part of his *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* (*Ocean of the Nectar of the Experience of Bhakti*) and *Upadeśāmṛta* (*Nectar of Instruction*). We additionally draw from other *bhakti*-relevant texts, especially the *Bhagavad Gītā* (here, too, following in Jīva’s footsteps). Our major departure from the textual corpus Jīva invokes is our own profuse referencing to Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtras*. This attention partly reflects this author’s own work on the *Yoga Sūtras* (Bryant 2009), but it also allows us to compare and contrast aspects of generic meditative *yoga* (*dhyāna*)—the practice systematized for the first time by Patañjali—with the path of *bhakti*. This is a contrast that surfaces repeatedly as a very important theme in the *Bhāgavata* as will be discovered, and hence we feel justified in frequently referring to the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali (which would be useful but not essential preparatory reading for the present work). This is especially so since, with modern *yogīs* in mind, the selections I have made from the *Bhāgavata* focus on Patañjali-like *yoga*, and I frequently draw attention to common concepts and phraseologies between the two sources.

Part 1 is divided into six sections. After these comments on the methodology of the volume, this section, “Introduction to the Volume,” introduces the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* itself, as well as the commentators who will be our guides. The next section, “Definition of *Bhakti*,” provides a definition of our subject matter. This is followed, in “The Practices of *Bhakti*,” with an extensive discussion on *bhakti yoga* itself in its various forms of practices and devotional attitudes between devotee and God. “The Practitioner of *Bhakti*, the *Bhakta*” features the devotee, agent, performer, and experiencer of *bhakti* (we note that *bhakti* is the practice and the *bhakta* is the practitioner, in distinction to *yoga*, which is the practice, and *yogī*, the practitioner). “The Object of *Bhakti*: *Īśvara*,

Bhagavān, *Brahman*, and Divine Hierarchies” discusses the various modes of understanding *Īśvara*, also referred to as *Bhagavān*, God, who is the object or recipient of *bhakti*. Finally, “Concluding Reflections” offers a few of this author’s thoughts pertaining to the *Bhāgavata*’s uneasy placement in the modern, post-Enlightenment, intellectual world of our times. Here, we also summarize the Kṛṣṇa tradition’s overall soteriology (the nature of the ultimate liberated state) and locate this within the larger framework of some of the Hindu *mokṣa* (liberation) traditions.

The remaining four parts of the volume consist of translations. Part 2 focuses on translations from the first nine books of the *Bhāgavata*, featuring the great exemplars and *yogī* virtuosi of the text—the *bhaktas*, the practitioners of *bhakti*, who have gained pan-Indian status and whose lives and devotional practices serve as inspirational role models for the tradition.¹⁴ The teachings of great *bhakta* sages or of various incarnations of *Īśvara* too are presented here; thus, some of the sections in part 2 are entitled “The Tale of...” and others “The Teachings of...” The *Bhāgavata*, as we will note below, contains a wide variety of subjects, but we will focus on the *yoga*-related components. Each section is introduced by a brief “*yoga* blueprint,” identifying the main *yogic* or theological message and other such distinguishing features being imparted by the narrative. In fact, the first nine books of the text are designed to prepare the reader with the requisite metaphysical, psychological, and other such devotional requirements to encounter with the appropriate attitude and understanding the summum bonum of the work in the tenth book, *Śrī Kṛṣṇa*.

It is in part 3 that we feature the most popular narratives from the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata*, pertaining to the object or recipient of *bhakti yoga* and ultimate goal of all its ingredients: Kṛṣṇa Himself.¹⁵ We will see here that the foundation of this form of *bhakti yoga* is based on the *Bhāgavata*’s narratives of Kṛṣṇa’s divine descent into this world as *avatāra*, breaking into human space and time and performing superwondrous deeds (as is the case with other manifestations of *Īśvara* in other *bhakti* traditions). Most especially, we will encounter here the

notion of *līlā*, the blissful pastimes Kṛṣṇa inaugurates with His beloved *bhaktas* for their pleasure, which lies at the very heart of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*: love of God. Here, too, from the many *līlās* featured in book 10, we have extracted those that best highlight Kṛṣṇa’s various types of relationships with His *bhaktas* and the corresponding *bhāvas* and *rasas*, emotional states of intense *bhakti*, as it is these that represent the ultimate goals of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* in the *Bhāgavata*.

In part 4, we present a translation of the *śikṣāṣṭaka*, “The Eight Verses of Instruction,” composed by Caitanya, teacher of Rūpa and Jīva Gosvāmīs, and the fountainhead of the Gauḍīya tradition, which considers him to be an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa. While Caitanya’s teachings were preserved and systematized by the *Gosvāmīs* and his life documented by later hagiographers in a number of works (from which we have extracted here a few illustrations from the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* and *Caitanya Bhāgavata*), Caitanya himself penned only these eight verses. Finally, part 5 offers a translation of the eighty-four *sūtras* of the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*. This is a late text modeled on the *Yoga Sūtras* with the intention of providing a succinct exposition of *bhakti* utilizing the *sūtra* genre of expression. It seems aware of the theology that found its most elaborate expressions in the sixteenth-century writings of our *Gosvāmīs* (and their contemporary, Vallabha) and so fits harmoniously with the focus of our volume. It is a useful manual for beginners.

With these preliminary comments pertaining to content and method in place, then, we will devote only a few cursory words to introducing the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, since we are limited in space here,¹⁶ and a few more introducing Rūpa and Jīva and their tradition.

The *Bhāgavata* as Text¹⁷

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* forms part of a corpus of texts emerging from the late Vedic period known as the *Purāṇas*. The early Vedic backdrop that spawned not just the *bhakti* of the *Bhāgavata*, but all Hindu forms of *yoga* and philosophies of *mokṣa* (liberation) cannot detain us here in detail (but see appendix 1 to get some sense of the Vedic literary and cultural

context from which, and against which, the *Bhāgavata* is establishing its authority).¹⁸ The word *purāṇa*, in Sanskrit, signifies “that which took place in the past”—namely, ancient lore or legend. The Purāṇas are listed as eighteen in number,¹⁹ and it is in this genre of texts that, among many other topics, the stories of the various incarnations and activities of *Īśvara*, God, and of His feminine counterpart, *Īśvarī*, the Goddess, when manifest on earth, are recorded. The Purāṇas also feature the incredible acts of devotion, *bhakti*, toward these manifestations of *Īśvara* by superexemplary *bhaktas*. Thus, since *bhakti* is nothing other than devotion to a form of *Īśvara* or *Īśvarī*, the Purāṇa texts are the mainstay of *bhakti yoga*. The most immediately encountered aspects of Hinduism—the forms, personalities, qualities, deeds, and so on of Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu, Śiva, the Goddess, and other divine *Īśvara* manifestations, depicted ubiquitously in the literature and the numerous classical art forms of ancient India—are almost entirely extracted from the Purāṇas (and two epics) and their derivative literatures, as we will see from our case study of the *Bhāgavata*. The Purāṇas as a genre, then, lie as the principal source of almost all forms of *bhakti yoga*.²⁰

In addition to these descriptions of the various *Īśvara* forms and their devotees, as well as the sectarian theologies and practices associated with them, these Purāṇas as we have them today are a vast repository of stories about kings and royal dynasties; creation accounts; traditional cosmologies; reworkings of ancient epic and Vedic narratives; *yogic* practices; popular religious beliefs concerning pilgrimages, holy places, and religious rites; information of social and cultural relevance such as caste duties; and even prophetic statements about the future. Almost everything that has come to be associated with “Hinduism” has its roots in the Purāṇas. The eighteen *mahā* (great) Purāṇas²¹ are said to contain four hundred thousand verses,²² and are the largest body of writing in Sanskrit.

There are two main transcendent deities in the Purāṇas, Śiva, and Viṣṇu—three, if we include Brahmā, the secondary creator,²³ but as we will see, as a mortal-created being,²⁴ he is more of a placeholder and

never a serious contender. While we will need to nuance this later, Śiva in the overall Purāṇic narrative is usually associated with the destruction of the universe at the end of each of its periodic cycles, and Viṣṇu, with its maintenance. A number of stories speak of a playful rivalry between these two. A later Purāṇa, the *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, marks the ascendancy into the Purāṇic genre of Devī, the Goddess, as the supreme matrix. As will be discussed in some detail within, the term “monotheism,” when extracted from its historical Abrahamic associations, can, if we wish to adopt it (given our earlier comments about prioritizing Sanskritic terminologies), be applied to certain expressions of the Purāṇic traditions, especially the various orthodox Vaiṣṇava traditions, but also certain Śaiva sects.²⁵ But this monotheism needs to be understood in the context of a Supreme Being, whether understood as Viṣṇu or Śiva, who can manifest as unlimited other transcendent *Īśvara* and *Īśvarī* Beings, who are thereby derivative from and thus secondary to the original Godhead. This is not polytheism: perhaps we can think of this as a “multiplicity in oneness” parallel of the Christian trinity.

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, consisting of twelve *skandhas* (cantos, subdivisions, or books), occupies itself primarily with Viṣṇu and His incarnations, featuring, most particularly, Kṛṣṇa. This focus is structurally reflected in the fact that Kṛṣṇa is the exclusive subject matter of the tenth book, which disproportionately constitutes about one-quarter of the entire text. It is this tenth book that has caused this Purāṇa to be recognized as the most famous work of Purāṇa literature by far. This tenth book, in my view, along with the *Rāmāyaṇa*, is one of the two most influential texts in Hinduism. This claim can be supported by the enormous amount of artistic and cultural traditions that its narratives have inspired over the last millennium in the form of derivative literature, poetry, drama, iconography, art, and temple sculpture, in addition to a vast array of intellectual and theological treatises from which the work of our *Gosvāmīs* is only one expression.²⁶ The text’s influence can also be gauged by the overwhelming preponderance of

traditional commentaries it inspired compared with all the other Purāṇas put together: the *Bhāgavata* has generated eighty-one commentaries currently available in Sanskrit alone, as well as others no longer extant (as a point of contrast, most of the Purāṇas have produced no traditional commentaries at all and others only one or, at most, with the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, two). It has been translated into almost all the languages of India, with forty or so translations on record in Bengal alone.²⁷ Tellingly, it has been neglected by Western scholarship until very recently. This is partly because the Victorian sensibilities of certain nineteenth-century Western Orientalists—and, just as important, early Hindu spokespersons and apologists influenced by Western moral discourses—were outraged by the amorous liaisons of Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhāgavata*, ignorant of their theological significances.²⁸ Consequently, the Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhāgavata* was jettisoned in favor of the more righteous Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhagavad Gītā* (henceforth *Gītā*)—a text that continues to produce hundreds of non-Indian translations—and still remains relatively unknown in the West.

As an unambiguously Vaiṣṇavite text—that is, adhering to Viṣṇu as the Supreme and Ultimate expression of Godhead (although the *Bhāgavata* will renegotiate Kṛṣṇa’s status here), the first nine books of the *Bhāgavata* discuss in greater or lesser detail some of the major incarnations prior to Kṛṣṇa. These pave the way for the tenth book, which comprises about four thousand out of a claimed eighteen thousand total verses of the entire Purāṇa²⁹ and is dedicated exclusively to Kṛṣṇa. Indeed, it is Kṛṣṇa, under His title of *Bhagavān* (defined later), who gives His name to the whole *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (literally, *Legend of Bhagavān*), as He does to the *Bhagavad Gītā* (literally, “that which was recited by *Bhagavān*”). Within Vaiṣṇavism, then, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is the Kṛṣṇa-centered text par excellence, to the point that the Kṛṣṇaite theologies that emerged in the sixteenth century³⁰ use the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as scriptural authority to claim that it is not Kṛṣṇa who is an incarnation of Viṣṇu, as He is depicted in the *Mahābhārata* epic and in the other Purāṇas, but rather Viṣṇu who is a partial incarnation of Kṛṣṇa. In the theology of Jīva, Rūpa, and their associates, it is Kṛṣṇa who is the

supreme Absolute Truth from whom all other deities, including Viṣṇu, evolve. Thus, Kṛṣṇaism positions itself within the larger matrix of Vaiṣṇavism as a familiar but also distinct expression.

It is an inconclusive task to try to assign specific dates to the Purāṇas, as shown by the considerable variation in the dates proposed by scholars for the *Bhāgavata* itself. Composed for public oral recitation, the Purāṇas are a maleable body of literature that continued to be transformed across the centuries by the fluid processes of transmission and adaptation to time and place as well as sectarian partialities. Any datable piece of information that may be gleaned from the texts may only reflect the historical period of that portion of the text and not necessarily other sections. Moreover, it is impossible to determine how long narratives had been in existence in oral form prior to being committed to writing. Hence Purāṇa scholars such as Rocher (1986) decline to attempt to date them. Accordingly, I will simply note here that the majority of scholars hold that the bulk of the material in most of the eighteen Purāṇas as we find them today reached its full completion and final form by the Gupta period, from about the fourth to the sixth century C.E.,³¹ even as many of these narratives had been evolving and handed down for many centuries prior to this.

There is no consensus regarding the date of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* itself in its finished form. While most specialists of the Purāṇas from India have opted for a completion around the fourth century C.E. during the Gupta period, some Western scholars have argued that it is the latest of the eighteen Purāṇas, written (depending on the scholar) sometime between the ninth and the thirteenth century C.E. in the south of the subcontinent. There are a number of significant reasons to question such a place of origin as well as time frame, which cause me to wonder whether the *Bhāgavata* too might not have reached its final form by the Gupta period along with the other major Purāṇas.³² No matter: for our present purposes here, we will only reiterate that whatever date one assigns to the *Bhāgavata* applies only to the final date of the entirety of the text as we now have it, not to the material contained within it or

even to portions of the text itself. As with the Purāṇic genre in general, the upper-limit date of the text is one issue, the date of the subject matter recorded in it is another.³³ Be this as it may, there is no question that the story of Kṛṣṇa is far older than the flowering of Purāṇic literature in the Gupta period. The earliest references to the Kṛṣṇa story, including sources outside the texts themselves, such as archaeological ones, take us back to at least the fourth to the fifth century B.C.E.³⁴

Needless to say, all such historical considerations of date and provenance are concerns for post-Enlightenment-derived, academic (text-critical) scholarship. Tradition holds the Purāṇa texts to be divine revelations, the *Smṛti*, “that which is remembered,” sacred Truths originating from an incarnation of *Īśvara* or empowered sage.³⁵ Thus the *Bhāgavata* records various different branches of its own earlier stages of transmission³⁶ prior to its final delivery by sage Śuka to King Parīkṣit that we will find in part 2, including its primordial origins as imparted by Kṛṣṇa to Brahmā at the beginning of creation (II.9.43). Brahmā is deemed to have then imparted it to sage Nārada, from whom it was transmitted to Vyāsa and then on to Śuka.

Moving into this frame of reference expressed in the text itself, in keeping with our own interests, the *Bhāgavata* introduces itself with the claim of being primarily a historical record of the events that transpired when “*Bhagavān*, Kṛṣṇa, performed superhuman activities ... concealed in the guise of a human” (I.1.20). In other words, it claims to be a record of events that transpired when God descended on earth.

Although the *Bhāgavata* ostensibly presents itself as containing ten topics or subject matters,³⁷ Jīva points out that actually the real purpose of the text is in fact to provide the reader with the opportunity to encounter Kṛṣṇa, *Bhagavān*, the tenth and ultimate topic. This tenth subject matter is Kṛṣṇa, the *āśraya* (support) of the entire text. As far as the *Bhāgavata* is concerned, “the great souls (*mahātmās*) describe the characteristics of the first nine topics, in order to clarify the tenth” (II.10.2). It is Kṛṣṇa who is the grand finale of all other subject matters.³⁸ The other nine topics—including the narratives of great kings—are

simply to highlight some of *Īśvara*’s potencies and qualities and provide some prerequisite context and preparatory devotional groundwork to enhance the appreciation of the ultimate topic revealed in the tenth book, God Himself: These stories of great kings, who spread their fame throughout the worlds and then met their death, have been narrated with the intention of expressing detachment from and insight into [the temporal nature of material grandeur]. They are just a display of rhetoric, they are not the Ultimate Truth. But, on the other hand, the descriptions and qualities of Kṛṣṇa³⁹ which destroy all inauspiciousness, should always be recited. One desiring to attain pure *bhakti* for Kṛṣṇa should always hear them without interruption. (XII.3.14–15) Therefore the sages in the forest of Naimiṣa we will encounter in part 2 were interested in hearing about even the saintly king Parikṣit, Kṛṣṇa’s grandnephew, only “if doing so is a basis for stories about Kṛṣṇa” (I.16.5–6).

The other nine topics—including the stories of the great *bhakta* exemplars and their teachings, which will be featured in part 2, as well as accounts of the deeds of Viṣṇu’s previous incarnations, along with various related teachings—are covered in the *Bhāgavata*’s books 1–9 and 11–12.⁴⁰ The activities of Kṛṣṇa take up book 10, a quarter of the entire Purāṇa’s bulk, and are represented in part 3 of this volume. So these previous books are preparatory, providing the necessary theological and metaphysical infrastructure to understand the narrations of Kṛṣṇa, the apex of the entire text. Kṛṣṇa is the summum bonum, the other subject matters providing progressive layers of context for his activities on earth, the *līlās*, Kṛṣṇa’s playful pastimes with His beloved devotees.

These *līlā* narratives of this delightful appearance of God have captured the hearts, minds, and intellects of countless Hindus across the centuries and underpin not only much of the aesthetics of Hinduism, but also a good deal of its theologizing. Our concern here is the intellectual textual traditions inspired by the *Bhāgavata*, but the cultural influence of the text has been massive. Anyone who has seen a performance of

classical Indian dance, for example, has very likely been treated to an enactment of some *līlā* episode from Kṛṣṇa's childhood, and there is every chance that if one happens upon a Hindu devotional poem or participates in an evening of *kīrtana* (devotional singing), narratives from the text will be featured. Likewise, anyone encountering a collection of traditional Indian paintings will be struck by how many depict scenes from the *Bhāgavata*, such as Kṛṣṇa with His beloved cowherd-women, the *gopīs*, and so forth with other art forms.⁴¹ And, of course, anyone chancing upon a Hindu temple anywhere in India will stand a good chance of encountering a deity of Kṛṣṇa, most typically (at least in the north) with His beloved consort, Rādhā.

The Commentaries

In any event, turning to the scholastic literary tradition, among the eighty-four or so Sanskrit commentaries written on the text's eighteen hundred verses, one was by Jīva Gosvāmī. Jīva was one of six *Gosvāmī* (renounced ascetic) theologians entrusted with intellectually systematizing the popular revival of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* emerging in the wake of the sixteenth-century charismatic Caitanya. This phenomenon—sometimes considered a renaissance of *bhakti*—took place primarily in East India as well as the Vṛndāvana area in northwest India. Bengal, in East India, was where Caitanya was born, and Vṛndāvana is where the *Bhāgavata* situates Kṛṣṇa's childhood millennia earlier.

Caitanya triggered a wave of Kṛṣṇa devotion across East India featuring meditations on Kṛṣṇa's early-life *līlā* pastimes in the *Bhāgavata*'s tenth book and its derived literature. His movement especially expressed itself through the ecstatic public chanting of Kṛṣṇa's names (we will provide a few glimpses of Caitanya's hagiography in part 1). Caitanya also contributed to the revival of the holy places associated with the *līlās* of the tenth book in Vṛndāvana (also referred to as Vraj herein),⁴² which, as a result, developed into the bustling sacred town of today. Here Jīva resided as one of the celebrated six *Gosvāmīs* who settled in this holy place. These *Gosvāmīs* were essentially the

intellectual founding figures of the tradition bestowed by Caitanya, producing an entire (and very extensive) canon of literary, philosophical, and aesthetic works dedicated to Kṛṣṇa. They were also responsible for the construction of most of the main temples in the town built on sites sacred to Kṛṣṇa, making Vṛndāvana one of the most thriving pilgrimage places in India today.⁴³ Thus a school was formed around Caitanya's life and teachings that came to be called the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition, or the Gauḍīya (Eastern) Vaiṣṇava tradition.

Although Caitanya personally recorded only eight verses in writing (see part 4, "The Eight Versus of Instruction"), he inculcated an elaborate theology of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* to some of His followers, especially Jīva's uncles Rūpa Gosvāmī and Sanātana Gosvāmī.⁴⁴ The distinguishing feature of these teachings from the perspective of the greater landscape of the multifarious *bhakti* traditions of the time is their focus on the various types of ecstatic mental states and intimate relationships with Kṛṣṇa that can be cultivated and attained through devotional practices, *bhakti yoga*. These teachings are, to all intents and purposes, a new body of divine revelation purporting to disclose details of some of the most intimate and personal eternal activities of God. Nonetheless, great energy is invested by the *Gosvāmīs* in locating their roots within the larger body of Vedic and Vedic-derived sacred texts accepted by all Hindu schools, the *Śruti* and *Smṛti* (hence the tradition sees itself as a Vedānta tradition, all of which is discussed within and in appendix 1).

Among other things, Rūpa wrote the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* (*Ocean of the Nectar of the Experience of Bhakti*) on these mental states (*bhāvas*) and relationships (*rasas*). In keeping with this imagery of the ocean, Rūpa divides his *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* into four "quadrants": the Eastern (EQ), Western (WQ), Southern (SQ), and Northern (NQ). These are further subdivided into a sequential numbering of "waves" (for which we have just substituted the numbers). We will be drawing mostly from the Eastern Quadrant here. Rūpa also wrote a small handbook on *bhakti* practice, the *Upadeśāmṛta* (*Nectar of Instruction*), to which we will be referring. But he primarily left it up to Jīva to systematize and articulate

the epistemology, metaphysics, and other philosophical ingredients of the tradition and situate it in accordance with the expected criteria of the intellectual milieu of the day. In addition to a considerable body of other writings, including his commentary on the *Bhāgavata* itself, Jīva compiled six treatises, the *Ṣat-Sandarbhas*, which subsequently took their place and remain at the core of the philosophy and *bhakti* systematics of this school.⁴⁵ These are essentially thematic analyses of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* from the perspective of the Gauḍīya tradition (that is, based on the “revelations” of Caitanya), which was developing in Jīva’s time. A Sandarbha is defined as a type of text “which illuminates an esoteric subject matter, expresses its essence as well as its excellence, gives its various meanings, and is worthy of learning.”⁴⁶ In part 1 of this work, we will be drawing from the fifth treatise, the *Bhakti Sandarbha*.⁴⁷

These six treatises encapsulate the entire philosophical basis—metaphysical, epistemological, ontological, ethical, and soteriological—of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, which considers itself a Vedānta tradition.⁴⁸ The Sandarbhas are designed sequentially, prior volumes providing the epistemological and metaphysical infrastructure precursory to the practice of *bhakti* outlined in the fifth Sandarbha, which itself is precursory to the sixth, the *Prīti Sandarbha*, which deals with the goal of *bhakti*, love of God. So, in the *Bhakti Sandarbha*, Jīva is assuming the reader’s familiarity with the previous four Sandarbhas and thus aware of the Gauḍīya position on certain essential issues central to the Vedānta as well as Purāṇa traditions. So by joining Jīva in his fifth Sandarbha, we are leap-frogging over Jīva’s own sequential logic. By this point in his Sandarbhas, Jīva has already established why the *Bhāgavata* is to be deemed the paramount scripture on *bhakti* (discussed in appendix 1), and he assumes knowledge of the tradition’s ontology (the nature of manifest reality, the individual self within it, and the Absolute Cause from which it emerges), outlined in the first four Sandarbhas. These are extensive domains in their own right, so we can touch only briefly upon such topics when we need to identify the main prerequisite metaphysical presuppositions fundamental to the present study on *bhakti* (especially in

the chapter “The Object of *Bhakti*: *Īśvara*, *Bhagavān*, *Brahman*, and Divine Hierarchies”). But we must note that Jīva has argued and defended the tradition’s theological fundamentals extensively through scriptural exegesis (interpretation) as well as through reason and argument. He has not simply assumed them.

In terms of the subject matter of these six Sandarbhas, briefly, the first, the *Tattva*, makes some preliminary comments on ontology and then focuses on epistemology (what constitutes a valid source of knowledge).⁴⁹ Since the exclusive focus on Kṛṣṇa as Godhead and *bhakti* as the summum bonum of human existence is based on the authority of the *Bhāgavata* tradition, Jīva must begin this first Sandarbha with the epistemological issue of what makes the *Bhāgavata* itself so authoritative. We have represented his arguments from the *Tattva Sandarbha* in appendix 1 so as not to overburden this introduction. The second Sandarbha, the *Bhagavat Sandarbha*, focuses on three transcendent aspects of the one Absolute Reality, with special attention directed toward the ultimate aspect of the personal *Bhagavān*, the Godhead (including monistic and monotheistic expressions). We will elaborate on this in some detail in “The Object of *Bhakti*.” The third, the *Paramātmā Sandarbha*, features another of these three transcendent aspects: the various manifestations of God derived from Kṛṣṇa in the form of the unlimited Viṣṇu immanent in or associated with the multiplicity of universes in *prakṛti*, the material realm. The fourth, the *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha*, focuses on the primacy of the form of Kṛṣṇa over other manifestations of *Bhagavān*, such as the multiple expressions of Viṣṇu, a topic also touched on in “The Object of *Bhakti*.” Thus, the first four Sandarbhas deal with the relationship between God and His energies, powers, and derivative manifestations. And the sixth, the *Prīti Sandarbha*, occupies itself with the goal, love of God, free from all personal motives. (See Dāsa 2007 for a brief introduction with sample translations from these Sandarbhas.) While we will be drawing on occasion from these other Sandarbhas as noted, in part 1 we are joining Jīva for the fifth, the *Bhakti Sandarbha*, which will outline the manifold ingredients and expressions of *bhakti*

yoga. All the Sandarbhas are subdivided into *anucchedas*, thematic or topical sections (henceforth *anu*).

Our aim in this volume has been to open a modest window into the theological underpinnings and devotional practices of one important *bhakti* tradition. We wish to stress once more that the same treatment can be directed to other *bhakti* traditions, Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Devī (Goddess) centered, to which we make frequent references. These all have their own powerful and coherent theological appeal and unique devotional depths. The rich variegation of these traditions reveals the multifarious theistic possibilities and richness of practice stemming from variants of *bhakti yoga* dedicated to the unlimited manifestations of *Īśvara/Bhagavān*. We will consider our meager effort in this regard successful if it inspires the reader to study the primary texts of these traditions directly in order to develop a deeper understanding of their tenets.

Despite our stated focus on attempting to present the tradition in its own terms and frame of references, or perhaps because of it, we would like to hope that this work will be of use to both academics and scholars interested in Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, as well as practitioners of some of the forms of *yoga*. From an academic perspective, in addition to gaining exposure to an entire devotional worldview and mode of living in the world, by following the logic of the organization and systematization of the textual material by our *Gosvāmīs*, we encounter a good example of sectarian hermeneutics (the methods of scriptural interpretation) committed to promoting a comprehensive view of ultimate reality through a specific *bhakti* lens. This hermeneutics includes the rationale through which certain texts are prioritized and others minimized or ignored, and how, within commonly shared texts, sections or even individual statements conducive to a lineage's sectarian ontologies and hierarchies are prioritized and those less amenable in this regard ignored or assigned secondary meanings.

From the *yoga* practitioners' perspective, we are afforded a window into how a community of *bhaktas* with scholarly gifts and inclinations

undertake what they deem to be their service both to their beloved Kṛṣṇa and to humanity at large. For them, this entails promoting, through the established intellectual criteria of their day and age, the metaphysics, practices, goals, and experiences of not just *yoga*, but *bhakti yoga* (an important distinction that we will discuss in detail). Specifically, in this tradition, the summum bonum of human existence is to attain *bhakti rasa*, ecstatic love of a higher *ātman*, *Īśvara*, God. There is no other ultimate meaning or purpose to embodied life: “The rising and setting of the sun simply steals away the life of people other than those whose time is spent in devotion to Kṛṣṇa” (*Bhāgavata* II.3.17). Jīva and Rūpa, along with their contemporary *Gosvāmī* (ascetic) associates, dedicated their lives to revealing to others in a remarkably erudite and intellectually rigorous manner the expressions such devotion takes in its Kṛṣṇa modalities. We encourage those who wish to gain a closer sense of the appeal of *bhakti* as a profound and meaningful worldview and soteriological goal to associate with those dedicated to their practices both in the past, through the literatures they have left behind, and in the present, through their teachings and observing their lifestyles and behaviors. Readers interested in pursuing this subject matter may care to study all the *Sandarbhas* and other *Gosvāmī* works systematically.⁵⁰ But first of all, of course, the reader is encouraged to read the entire *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in its own right.⁵¹

Om tat sat

PART I

Introduction to *Bhakti* Yoga

Elaborate on that which is called the *Bhāgavata*, such that *bhakti* for *Bhagavān*, Hari, will manifest among people.

—Brahmā to Sage Nārada, II.8.51–52

Definition of *Bhakti*

We begin with a definition of *bhakti yoga*. But let us first briefly note that the impulse for taking up *bhakti* in the first place is the same as that for any aspiring *yogī* undertaking any path of *yoga*: harassed by the suffering and unfulfillment inherent in embodied existence in *samsāra*, the world of birth and death, one seeks to avoid future suffering. Thus, the opening verse of the fourth-century *Sāṅkhya Kārikā* makes awareness of suffering a prerequisite for seeking higher Truth: “It is because of the torment of the threefold sufferings—from one’s own body and mind, from other living entities, and from the environment—that the desire to know the means to counteract them arises” (I.1). Adopting a form of *yoga* with serious intent as this entails coming to the realization not just that one is suffering, but that all attempts at finding happiness through the body/mind mechanism, when disconnected from knowledge of the *ātman* (innermost self) or of *Īśvara*—the Supreme Being, God—produces only temporal relief, and even this does not fulfill in any ultimate sense. Hence *Sarvaṃ duḥkham* (“All is frustration”) is a central maxim not only of Buddhism, where it is the first foundational Truth of the entire tradition, but of almost all the *yoga* traditions.¹ If one accepts (as did the ancient materialist voices related to Cārvāka²) that no doubt there is suffering, but there is also happiness to be sought and found in the pleasures of the world, then one will naturally channel one’s energies into pursuing whatever it is that one perceives as being a source of that happiness. In this case, one will not take to a *yoga* path with full

dedication or, at least, will not do so in accordance with the presuppositions and commitments of all the classical *yoga*, or *mokṣa* (liberation-seeking), traditions, Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain.

Thus the first dawning of insight, *viveka*, in Yoga (*Yoga Sūtras* II.15)³ is precisely that *all* is frustration, or at least unfulfilling, when one is under the influence of *avidyā*, ignorance (of the true *ātman* self). Try as one may through the stimulation of the body, mind, and intellect, one cannot shake off a deep-rooted sense of existential malaise and lack of deep-level fulfillment. When that Truth dawns irrevocably, one is ready to sincerely seek alternatives. In *bhakti*, this entails taking refuge of *Īśvara*, God, and it is this devotional surrender to a Supreme Being that lies at the heart of *bhakti yoga*.⁴ Rather than pursuing other options such as those of the generic *yoga* or *jñāna* (knowledge of *ātman*) traditions, then, the *yogī* turns to *Īśvara*, but the motive is the same: one has failed to counteract suffering by other known material means.⁵

However, while the practices of *bhakti* are initially performed out of a desire to avoid suffering, *vaidhī bhakti*, they eventually develop into unmotivated, spontaneous, and ecstatic love for God, *rāgānugā bhakti*, as we will see. And it is because of this ultimate result that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* follows the *Gītā* in unambiguously asserting that *bhakti* is superior to other *yogas* (for instance, see *Gītā* VI.46–47, XII.2, and throughout). This is both because it is an easier path and more joyfully performed (*Gītā* IX.2) and because it reveals a higher Truth than that revealed by other *yoga* paths. Through other forms of *yoga* one can attain awareness of the *ātman*, the innermost self (the pure consciousness that is the goal of Patañjali in the chapter “The Practitioner of *Bhakti*, the *Bhakta*”), but through *bhakti*, in addition to the *ātman*, one can attain awareness culminating in ecstatic love of *Parama-ātman*, *Īśvara*, the Supreme *Ātman* beyond the individual *ātman*. In the Vaiṣṇava reading of the *Gītā* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Īśvara*, also known as *Bhagavān*, is a Truth beyond that of the *ātman*.⁶ And the Ultimate *Īśvara* is Kṛṣṇa. We will return to all this in considerable detail later in “The Object of *Bhakti*,” but for now we can consider *bhakti yoga* as the specific means

and practices through which one takes shelter of *Īśvara*, initially—at least for most practitioners—out of material desperation, but eventually out of unrestrainable, intoxicating love.

With regard to a formal definition of *bhakti*, there were, naturally, a variety of overlapping definitions in circulation in textual sources, highlighting its various ingredients and different emphasis given by different sages. The *Bhakti Sūtras* of Nārada (16–19) expresses a few: “*Bhakti* includes attachment to *pūjā* (ritual worship of *Īśvara*), according to sage Vyāsa; love of *kathā* (stories about *Īśvara*’s incarnations) and such things, according to sage Garga; and the offering of all acts to *Īśvara* and the experiencing of extreme distress upon forgetting Him, according to sage Nārada.” (We use the gendered pronouns “He” and “Him” and the like, as *Īśvara* is a masculine entity; *Īśvarī* is the feminine form, and were this analysis focused on Durgā, Lakṣmī, Rādhā, or Kālī, as opposed to Kṛṣṇa, we would use feminine pronoun forms.)⁷ The *Sauṇḍilya Sūtra* states that “*bhakti* is supreme devotion (*anurakti*) for *Īśvara*” (I.2).

As discussed in the introduction, Rūpa Gosvāmī and his nephew Jīva Gosvāmī will be our primary guides in our analysis of *bhakti* throughout this part, so we will focus on the definitions they select. In his *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, Rūpa offers the following definition: “*Bhakti* is said to be service to Kṛṣṇa,⁸ by means of the senses. This service is free of all limitations, dedicated to Him and pure [of self-motive].”⁹ Jīva opts for a similar definition: “The root *bhaj* means to offer service.¹⁰ Therefore the wise have described *bhakti*, which is the preeminent path of attaining perfection, as service.”¹¹ Thus, putting all these together, *bhakti* is theistic and encompasses such activities as worship; the offering of one’s acts to *Īśvara*; reading the stories of His divine incarnations; constant remembrance of Him; and, for Rūpa and Jīva most especially, using oneself in the service of Kṛṣṇa, the ultimate expression of *Īśvara*. We might briefly note here that service is synonymous with love. True love, one can suggest, is nothing other than the experience of complete satisfaction attained from fully dedicating oneself to pleasing one’s beloved through acts of devotion and service. And, of course, for love to

be true, this devotion and service must be fully reciprocal. We will see in part 3 the unbounded degree to which Kṛṣṇa, despite being supremely independent as the Ultimate Absolute Being, returns the love of His devotees by submitting to them according to their desire.

Bhakti, then, is love of God free of all self-interest. Indeed, Rūpa nuances loving service by defining the “highest type” of devotion (*uttama bhakti*), as “continued service to Kṛṣṇa, which is [performed] pleasingly,¹² is unobstructed by the desire for liberation or enjoying the fruits of one’s work in the world, and is free of any other desire.”¹³ In the words of the *Bhāgavata*: The characteristics of *bhakti yoga*, which is free of the *guṇas*, has been described as that *bhakti* to the Supreme Person which is free of motive, and uninterrupted. Such persons [who engage in this] do not accept the five types of liberation¹⁴ ... even if these are offered, if they are devoid of service to God. (III.29.12–14) These five types of Vaiṣṇava postmortem liberation will occupy us later, but it is important to note that the very notion of liberation itself, the generic goal of all *yoga* systems, is rejected in the higher stages of *bhakti*, a theme that we will return to frequently. In fact, disinterest in liberation is one of six qualities accompanying *bhakti* identified by Rūpa in another of his works¹⁵ partly because it is still in the realms of self-interest, but also because the bliss *bhakti* bestows far surpasses the bliss of the *ātman*’s immersion in its own nature of pure consciousness, the culmination of the generic path of *yoga*.

The common denominator underpinning all of these definitions of *bhakti yoga* is that they feature the *bhakta*—a type of *yogī* who practices *bhakti*—and *Īśvara*, God, a Supreme Being who is the object of *bhakti*. Thus *bhakti* as a *yoga* process requires at least two entities: the *bhakta* and *Īśvara*. In the next section of part 1 we will turn to the practices of *bhakti yoga* itself, following very closely in the footsteps of our guides, Jīva and Rūpa; in “The Practitioner of *Bhakti*, the *Bhakta*,” we will consider some of the characteristics of the *bhakta* as a *yogī*; and in “The Object of *Bhakti*,” we will engage some of the ways *Īśvara*, or the term’s

near synonym *Bhagavān*, has been construed in important *bhakti* traditions of India. We will use the terms *Īśvara* and *Bhagavān* synonymously for now (but will provide some nuance between them in “The Object of *Bhakti*”) and note that in the *Bhāgavata*, Kṛṣṇa is presented as the most complete and perfect expression of these terms, the source of all the other unlimited manifestations of *Īśvara/Bhagavān*.

Then, in parts 2 and 3, we exemplify these three aspects of *bhakti yoga* through translations from the *Bhāgavata* itself as source text. We have noted that it is the stories of Kṛṣṇa as *Īśvara/Bhagavān* when He incarnated into the world that have most especially delighted and enchanted *bhaktas* from all Hindu devotional traditions across the ages and that have made the *Bhāgavata* the most devotionally influential text in Hinduism along with the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The innermost core of *bhakti yoga* in the Kṛṣṇa tradition is nothing other than the expression of this enchantment.

The Practices of *Bhakti*

Vaidhī (Prescriptive) *Bhakti* and *Rāgānugā* (Spontaneous) *Bhakti*

In the *Bhakti Sandarbha*, Jīva structures his analysis of *bhakti yoga* around a twofold categorization: *vaidhī bhakti* and *rāgānugā bhakti*. *Vaidhī bhakti* is devotion prompted by rules and prescriptions (*vidhī*)—the injunctions of scripture. In other words, it consists of regulated practices established by tradition—which typically means texts associated with *Īśvara* (for instance, see *Gītā* IV.7–8) or with accomplished predecessor *bhaktas* who attained success in the past and are therefore devotional exemplars and authorities such as our *Gosvāmīs*. *Rāgānugā bhakti* manifests in the case of very rare souls in the form of devotion that has no need for following prescribed or formalized methods but rather results spontaneously from natural innate attraction (*rāga*) for *Īśvara*. In Rūpa’s words, *vaidhī* “is born from the prescriptions of the sacred texts, rather than emerging from the development of desire for God,” as is the case with *rāgānugā* (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant¹ 2.6). *Vaidhī* is the method adopted by the vast majority of practitioners who strive to cultivate *bhakti*, while *rāgānugā* stems from inherent attraction unmediated by regulations—at least in this life (in fact, *rāgānugā* usually stems from perfected past-life *vaidhī* practice but can in rare cases be attained by grace).

However, we should immediately note for those familiar with *yoga* concepts that the type of *rāga* in *rāgānugā* (literally, “following” *anugā*, *rāga*) reflects the highest type of *yogic* attainment in this system, since it

is focused exclusively on *Īśvara*, as will be discussed in detail later, and is not to be confused with mundane desire—the *rāga* of Patañjali, for example, which, stemming from ignorance, is focused on the body and mind and is an obstacle to *yoga* (a *kleśa* per *Yoga Sūtras* II.4–7). We will first consider *vaidhī bhakti*, which will introduce us to the nine standard practices typically associated with the term *bhakti yoga* and thus with the central theme of this book, and then *rāgānugā*.

The Nine Practices of *Vaidhī Bhakti*

The *Bhāgavata* distills the actual practices of *bhakti* into nine basic activities that constitute the standard classical Vaiṣṇava list of primary *bhakti yoga* processes: The nine characteristics of *bhakti* that people can offer to Viṣṇu² are: hearing about Him, singing about Him, remembering Him, serving His feet, worshipping Him, glorifying Him, considering oneself His servant, considering oneself His friend, and surrendering completely to Him. (VII.5.23) Thus, just as the practices for generic or classical *yoga* as articulated in the *Yoga Sūtras* are schematized by Patañjali as consisting of eight limbs, the *aṣṭāṅga* (II.29ff.), even as there were multiple variants and alternative models;³ and just as some of the Vedānta traditions divide *jñāna yoga*, the path of knowledge, into three (or four) primary activities;⁴ so the classical practices of *bhakti yoga* are formalized as comprising these nine, even as this list is certainly not exhaustive or exclusive as we will see. We will discuss these processes one by one.

Śravaṇa (Hearing)

The first actual activity or process of *bhakti*, *śravaṇa*, hearing about *Īśvara*, God, is the starting point from which the other eight processes of *bhakti* develop.⁵ Obviously any sort of spiritual practice can begin only when one initially hears or learns something about it. In Jīva's definition: "When the organs of hearing contact the words describing the name, form, qualities, and pastimes [of *Bhagavān*], the term *śravaṇa* is assigned" (*anu* 248). In the time of the *Bhāgavata*, and still in Jīva's time, most people would have received the text orally, since primarily only

some members of the *brāhmaṇa* caste were literate, and so the text would typically have been recited by one of them from memory or from a hand-copied manuscript. With the widespread nature of literacy and print media in our day and age, we of course have the facility to read the accounts. Either way, both hearing and reading relate to absorbing the mind in God manifest as sacred Word, and this is the essence of *śravaṇa*.

In fact, the entire *Bhāgavata* sees its own raison d'être as sacred text as being nothing other than the recording and preserving of narratives about *Īśvara* such that they can be formally heard (XII.13.18). These stories, called *līlās*, are deemed so delightful and enchanting that they naturally capture the mind. Just as in conventional love affairs, a person becomes enamored with the form, qualities, and activities of a beloved and, when love is in full bloom, can think of nothing else, so, in *bhakti*, the mind is captivated by *Īśvara* as encountered in the amazing stories contained in texts such as the *Bhāgavata*. When this initial attraction is channeled through the nine practices, devotion and love of God can develop. The *Bhāgavata* is nothing other than concentrated *śravaṇa*, composed so that the seeds of *bhakti yoga* can be planted in the minds of those seeking a relationship with *Īśvara*.

Once the mind becomes attracted to the stories of Kṛṣṇa through *śravaṇa* and, in time, captivated by love for Him, it loses its attachments to this world, which pale in comparison. This too happens naturally. The mind consequently shakes off the grip of mundane desire, which is the fuel perpetuating the cycle of birth and death in all *yoga* traditions. One thereby becomes eligible for liberation from this cycle, *saṁsāra*. *Bhakti*, from the perspective of being a *yoga* process, is nothing other than this. Of course, as we will find out, liberation is not in fact sought by true *bhaktas*, who wish to be immersed in thoughts of Kṛṣṇa rather than in the *ātman*, a state of consciousness devoid of all objects, as per the goal of generic *yoga*. We are repeatedly reminded that, from *śravaṇa*, hearing about Kṛṣṇa, one's mind becomes so enchanted that, to say nothing of interest in material (*prakṛtic*) things, it loses all interest it might have had in conventional *ātman* liberation.⁶ This is because conventional

liberation deprives the *bhakta* from hearing about the beloved *Īśvara*: “I will never desire even liberation, O Lord, because in that state there is no nectar about your lotus feet, which flows out of the depths of the hearts and through the mouths of the great souls. Please grant me this boon: let me have 10,000 ears [to hear about You]” (IV.20.24). The *Bhāgavata* cannot comprehend anyone not becoming enchanted by Kṛṣṇa: “Who, absorbed in hearing the narrations of Hari, could possibly not develop attraction for them?” (II.3.12).

We will illustrate aspects of the nine processes of *bhakti* with anecdotes from the hagiography of Rūpa’s teacher, Caitanya Mahāprabhu, beginning here with a passage pertaining to the effects that can be wrought on the listener by the practice of *śravaṇa* about Kṛṣṇa: Then [Caitanya] visited another gentleman’s house.... Ratnagarbha Ācārya was a great devotee of the Lord, and was very fond of the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. He was at that time reading from the *Bhāgavatam* with great respect and affection.... [He read a passage from book X, where the wives of the *brāhmaṇas* meet Lord Kṛṣṇa].... Spoken with great devotion, these words of the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* entered the ears of Lord Viśvambhara [Caitanya]. As soon as he heard these words ... [Caitanya] ... fell down unconscious overcome with spiritual ecstasy. All the students were amazed at the sight. After remaining in trance for a while, the Lord regained his external consciousness. When he was able to speak, the Lord said to Ratnagarbha Ācārya: “Go on, Go on.” He rolled on the ground in ecstasy. The Lord continued to urge him on, saying, “Go on! Go on!” The *brāhmaṇa* continued to read, and everyone floated on the nectarine ocean of love of Kṛṣṇa. Unrestrained tears from the Lord’s eyes flooded the entire world. All the ecstatic symptoms like shivering, horripilation, and crying manifested in the Lord’s person.” (*Caitanya Bhāgavata, Madhya-khaṇḍa*, I.300–10)⁷

Since Kṛṣṇa is the source of all bliss, when His presence contained in the *līlās*, stories, enters through the ears by means of *śravaṇa*, the body experiences bliss, and its normal functioning can be disrupted. Indeed,

the body can erupt into physiologically aberrant symptoms, such as emitting tears or displaying hair standing on end, owing to contact with this transcendent presence. We will encounter such effects ensuing from the other *bhakti* practices as well. This is the ecstasy of devotion.

Thus, the entire *Bhāgavata* is composed to provide an opportunity for *śravaṇa* and, through that, a vivid and transformational encounter with *Īśvara*, which culminates in falling in love with God: For the righteous, who are free of envy, the highest *dharma* is to be found in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*, in which all dishonesty (worldly *dharmas*) has been rejected.⁸ Composed by the great sage Vyāsa, only the Ultimate Truth is revealed here, which bestows auspiciousness, and uproots the threefold miseries of life.⁹ Can *Īśvara* be immediately captured in the heart by anything else? In this text, He is captured in an instant by the virtuous who desire to hear. It is the succulent ripened fruit of the desire tree¹⁰ of the Vedic scriptures....¹¹ *Aho!*¹² O connoisseurs of divine ecstasy,¹³ while in this world drink continuously the spiritual flavors (*rasa*) of the *Bhāgavata*—love of God—to your full satisfaction. (I.1.2–3) Indeed, as we will see in his tale, prior to his composition of the *Bhāgavata*, the despondency of the great sage Vyāsa—whom tradition ascribes to be the divider of the one Veda into four, the compiler of the one Purāṇa into eighteen Purāṇas totaling four hundred thousand verses, the recorder of the immense one-hundred-thousand-verse *Mahābhārata* epic (and even the primary commentator on the *Yoga Sūtras*)—was precisely because, despite this prolificacy, he had not adequately described the *līlā* narrations of *Bhagavān* Kṛṣṇa in all this massive output of knowledge. His heart was thus dry from lack of *rasa*, devotional ecstasy. From the perspective of *bhakti*, all these other texts deal with mundane subject matters or, at best, in the case of the *mokṣa* (liberation) traditions of generic *yoga*, spiritually incomplete topics: Sir, for the most part, you have not described the spotless fame of *Bhagavān*.¹⁴ I consider any knowledge, which does not satisfy the Lord, to be barren. You have not described the greatness of Vāsudeva (Kṛṣṇa), to the same extent that you have glorified the four mundane goals of life—*dharma*, civic duty; *artha*,

material prosperity; *kāma*, fulfillment of desires; and *mokṣa*, liberation of the *ātman*.¹⁵ Those who dwell in the lovely abode of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* do not find attractive those words, even if replete with literary embellishments, that do not describe the glory of Hari [Kṛṣṇa], which purify the world—just as the swans from the celestial Mānasa lake do not dwell in the ponds frequented by crows. (I.5.8–11)¹⁶

Thus, the entire *Bhāgavata*, and especially its tenth book, is nothing other than *śravaṇa* about Kṛṣṇa, the summum bonum of existence. And *bhakti yoga* is nothing other than the mind becoming attracted to the *līlās*, pastimes, through *śravaṇa*, and then subsequently engaging itself in the remaining eight processes of *bhakti* such that this blissful encounter with Kṛṣṇa can be cultivated into an active relationship and ceaselessly deepened.

Before proceeding to the remaining practices of *bhakti*, Jīva presents a sequence of focus pertaining to *śravaṇa*, hearing about Kṛṣṇa, which also applies to the next two processes of *bhakti*. He notes that the ideal progression in the order of aural topics is, optimally, first to hear about Kṛṣṇa’s names, then to hear about His forms, then His qualities, and finally His *līlās*, pastimes, in that order (*anu* 256). While hearing about any of these and in any order can lead to perfection, he states that generally the process starts with hearing the names of Kṛṣṇa. This cleanses the mind, allowing it sufficient purity to begin to comprehend the second item of focus, Kṛṣṇa’s form: “Entering through the ears, that form becomes imprinted on the minds of the saints and never escapes” (XI.30.3). Once the form manifests in the mind, then, in turn, one can better hear about the qualities associated with Kṛṣṇa’s form. Each step of this process purifies the mind further, until finally Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās*, pastimes, which of course feature and highlight His form and qualities, can be experienced, as we will discover in part 3.

Kīrtana (Chanting)

Kīrtana refers to singing, chanting, or reciting the names and deeds of *Īśvara*. As with all the nine processes, “*bhakti* for *Bhagavān* will arise in

one who sings, hears about, and rejoices in Him” (X.69.45). Although *śravaṇa* is the primary and foundational practice of *bhakti*, it is, in a sense, a passive activity. *Kīrtana* is the preeminent active spiritual practice promoted by the *Bhāgavata*,¹⁷ and is the most accessible process for attaining immediate personal contact with *Īśvara* for most practitioners.

This is so because sacred names are considered identical to *Īśvara*: “the Lord ... takes the form of mantras” (I.5.38). *Mantras* are divine presence, not symbols or names representing something beyond themselves as with normal language. They embody actual immediate Divinity. Conventional names and words, such as “book” or “pot,” are representational sounds, established by social consensus for the purpose of communication. And they differ from one language group to another: the English word “book” is *pustaka* in Sanskrit, *libro* in Italian, *kitab* in Hindi/Urdu, and so on (and one could just as well invent a new word for book, such as “umma-gumma,” if one could convince other people in one’s social sphere to start adopting it). So conventional words are different from the actual objects to which they refer;¹⁸ one’s thirst cannot be quenched by saying “water,” since the word “water” is different from the substance water, nor will the contents of this book be internalized simply by repeating its title. The name of Kṛṣṇa, in contrast, *is* Kṛṣṇa personally and immediately present in sonic form. Therefore, God can be directly experienced by reciting His name: The Name [of Kṛṣṇa] is absolute and it is pure, because there is no difference between the Name, and that which it denotes. The Name *is* Kṛṣṇa Himself in His form of pure consciousness.¹⁹ It is eternally liberated. It is a wish-granting gem.²⁰ The Name, etc.,²¹ of Śrī Kṛṣṇa cannot be grasped by the material senses: Kṛṣṇa Himself manifests [by His own accord] on the tip of the tongue, which has been applied to service [in the form of chanting]. (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant II.233–34) That Kṛṣṇa can actually personally appear in the form of the Name (sometimes written with a capital “N” to stress its nondifference from the person God) is just a sonic parallel of the claims, discussed later, that He can also appear

before the eyes in a perceivable form.²² As a vision of Kṛṣṇa is visual divine presence, the sound “Kṛṣṇa” is sonal divine presence. In both cases, this presence is perceived or not perceived in proportion to the purity and devotion of the *bhakta* or not. Hence, since Kṛṣṇa fully manifests His personal presence for advanced practitioners, such *bhaktas* can exhibit extreme ecstatic states in *kīrtana*. This is because whenever the psychophysical mechanism contacts Kṛṣṇa manifest in any form such as sound, the ecstasy the mind and body experience from this direct encounter causes them to erupt into abnormal physical symptoms. Kṛṣṇa is the embodiment of ultimate bliss, and extreme bliss can wreak havoc on the conventional functioning of the body/mind mechanisms. These bodily reactions can sometimes be quite startling to conventional perception. Consider the dramatic ecstatic symptoms produced by *kīrtana* that were exhibited frequently by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu (Prabhu, below): Mahāprabhu danced ... deeply absorbed and the people all around him were wet with the tears of *prema* [divine love] of Prabhu. Prabhu raised his arms and said, “*Bol! Bol!*” [“Chant! Chant!”] and the people floating in *ānanda* [bliss] raised the sound of Hari. Now he fell in a faint, and he had no more breath; and suddenly he stood up again and shouted. He was like a *śimūlī* tree, thick with gooseflesh: sometimes his body blossomed [with it], and sometimes it abated. Blood sweat came out of every pore of his body, and he stuttered.... It seemed that each of his teeth were separately trembling; his teeth chattered so, it seemed that they would fall out on the ground. As time went on Prabhu became increasingly absorbed in *ānanda*. The third watch came, and still the dancing was not ended. A sea of *ānanda* welled up in all the people, and everyone forgot their bodies, their selves, and their homes. (*Caitanya Caritāmṛta Antya-līlā* 10.66–73)²³

I sometimes analogize such states as comparable to an electric appliance designed for one voltage system, blowing its mechanisms when contacting a much higher voltage system.

Mantra, then, sometimes called *nāma-avatāra*, sonic incarnation, is

“infused with specific power, either by the Lord or great sages, and establishes a unique relationship with the Lord,” says Jīva (*anu* 284). In the words of the *Bhāgavata*, “The Lord of worship is without material form, but He takes the form of *mantras*. By worshipping Him by means of the forms of these names, a person becomes a sage and his or her perception becomes perfect” (I.5.37–38). As fire permeates an iron bar, which becomes “fire-ized” and nondifferent from fire because of such permeation, so *Īśvara* manifests within *prakṛti* in various forms, one of which is sound, such that it becomes *Īśvara*-ized, so to speak. And, as wherever there is fire there are the qualities of heat and light, so wherever *Īśvara* is present, there is, in addition to ecstasy, purity as well. Hence, in addition to its bliss-bestowing potential, *kīrtana* is especially effective in removing impure influences from the mind (the *kleśas*).²⁴

A sinful person is not purified by the acts of atonement and vows prescribed by the experts in Vedic knowledge as much as by the reciting of the syllables of the name of Hari.... For even when atonement is performed, it is not really accomplished if thereafter the mind once again runs along the path of unrighteousness. For one who desires to eliminate all *karma*, the repetition of the names and qualities of Hari truly makes the mind pure (*sāttvika*) [and hence one loses the desire to perform further unrighteous acts]. (VI.2.11–12) Other purificatory processes may eliminate the negative *karmic* consequences of unrighteous action, but they do not eradicate the initial impulses or desires, called *saṁskāras* in Yoga psychology, that prompted such behavior in the first place. Hence, those *saṁskāras* (not to be confused with *saṁsāra*²⁵) can activate again. This is sometimes compared with an elephant taking a bath in the river only to emerge from the water and then roll in the sand again. *Kīrtana* eradicates the *saṁskāras* themselves, not just their *karmic* consequences, and hence is considered the supreme purifier.

The reason for this is that since *Īśvara* is nondifferent from the name,

it is *Īśvara* who actually manifests personally within the mind of the sincere chanter, and where *Īśvara* is present, there can be no impurity: “*Bhagavān* quickly enters the heart of one who faithfully hears and constantly recites His activities. Entering through the portals of the ears, Kṛṣṇa purifies all impurities from the lotuslike heart of His devotees, like Autumn does to the waters” (II.8.4–5). Consequently: “A thief; a drunkard; a murderer of friends; a killer of *brāhmaṇas*; one who defiles his *guru*’s bed; a murderer of a woman, king, parent, or cow; all these and other types of sinners—indeed for every kind of evil person—the chanting of the name is the best atonement; the mind of Viṣṇu [is attracted] by that sound” (VI.2.10–11).

Of course, since *kīrtana* is initially a *vaidhī* practice, and thus typically initiated by self-centeredness (albeit of the right sort) rather than pure love of God, it may take some time for these impurities to clear such that the consequent natural sweetness of the name can manifest, and ecstasy be experienced, as Rūpa notes: “Even though the name, activities and so forth of Kṛṣṇa may be sweet, they may not be relishable to a tongue which is afflicted by the bile of ignorance. Nonetheless, if chanted every day diligently, it destroys the poison at its roots, and its nectar slowly becomes pleasurable” (*Upadeśāmṛta*, 7). But once the heart (the seat of the mind) has been cleansed through *kīrtana*, and *Bhagavān* has begun to reveal His presence, the ecstatic effects of *kīrtana* can be quickly felt: “When one’s love is awakened and one’s heart has melted while chanting loudly the names of one’s beloved Lord, one laughs, one weeps, one cries out, one sings and one dances like a madman, completely indifferent to social norms” (XI.2.40). Thus *kīrtana* embodies both *yoga* as method—clearing all impurities (*kleśas*)—and *yoga* as goal—ecstatic love of God.

In fact, the *Bhāgavata*, along with other Purāṇas,²⁶ considers *kīrtana* to be the *yuga dharma*, the recommended spiritual practice for *Kali yuga*, the present and most degraded of the four ages (*yugas*):²⁷

Although the age of *Kali* is a breeding ground of faults, O king, it does have one great quality: merely by performing Kṛṣṇa *kīrtana*,

one is freed from attachments and attains the supreme. The goal that was obtained in the *yuga* of *Satya* by meditation (*dhyāna*), in the *yuga* of *Tretā* by worshipping through ritualistic sacrifices (*yajña*), in the *yuga* of *Dvāpara* by deity worship (*paricaryā*), is attained in the *yuga* of *Kali* by *kīrtana*. (XII.3.52)²⁸

Consequently: “The noble Āryans,²⁹ who are connoisseurs of quality and extract the essence of things, extol the age of *Kali*, because in that age, all desired objects are obtained merely by *saṅkīrtana*”³⁰ (XI.5.36).

The practice of *japa* is also situated under the rubric of *kīrtana*. Where *kīrtana* is a public congregational practice, *japa* is the personal, private, and meditative recitation of *mantra*. The verb *jap* means to repeat something softly. The term has its origins in the Vedic period³¹ and, by the Upaniṣads, the earliest mystico-philosophical texts in the Vedic corpus, becomes associated with the repetition of *om̐*. *Om̐* in these texts is identified with *Brahman*³²—*Brahman* is the name given to the Absolute Truth in the Upaniṣads—and both *om̐* and *Brahman* in turn become identified with *Īśvara*, the personal feature of *Brahman*.³³ (The various ways *Brahman* is construed in the main schools derived from the Upaniṣads, and exactly how it correlates with the term *Īśvara* is a topic that will occupy our attention in “The Object of *Bhakti*.”) As *bhakti* practices superseded the old Vedic rituals, the term *japa* increasingly referred to the soft (or silent) repetition of *Īśvara*’s name—that is, the absorption of the mind in the Deity’s sonic *mantra* form, or sound presence. Thus, Kṛṣṇa states in the *Gītā* that He is *om̐*,³⁴ and of all ritual offerings, He is *japa* (X.25). Likewise, in the *Yoga Sūtras*, *Īśvara* is presented as the most important object upon which to fix the mind in order to still it, and one does this through performing *japa* on *om̐*, His signifier, “keeping its meaning in mind” (I.28; we will consider a *bhakti* reading of this phrase below). In the more developed theisms of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, *om̐* is retained but expands into the more personal *mantras* associated with *Īśvara* as Śiva and Viṣṇu. The two *mantras* explicitly expressed in the *Bhāgavata* are *om̐ namo Nārāyaṇāya*, the

mantra for Viṣṇu (VIII.3.32), and *om namo Bhagavate Vāsudevāya*, that for Kṛṣṇa (I.5.37, IV.8.54, VIII.16.39). The corresponding *mantra* in Śaivism is *om namo Śivāya*. In Jīva’s Gauḍīya tradition, *japa* becomes the primary practice of personal meditation, and Caitanya popularized the chanting of the by now well-known Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* (great *mantra*): *Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare; Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare*.

Mantra japa is optimally performed first thing in the morning—ideally an hour or so before the sun rises. This is called the *brāhma-muhūrta* (*Brahman* time).³⁵ At this time, the mind is rested and no longer in a state of lethargy (*tamas*), and the activity of the day has yet to commence with the awakening of living creatures and life’s duties along with the rising sun (*rajas*). This *brāhma-muhūrta* is the optimal time for *yogīs* serious about meditation, as it is the period most favorable for concentration, detachment, and calmness.

In *japa* meditation, all the generic rules of classical Patañjali-type meditation apply: the mind is to be fixed without deviation on the *mantra* (*Yoga Sūtras* I.28 and 32), and this practice requires prolonged regular effort (I.12–13). However, this is ideally performed in a mind imbued with love for *Īśvara*, *bhāva*, discussed below, rather than just mechanically.³⁶ Additionally, the *japa* is uttered in a mood of total dependency on *Īśvara*’s grace as opposed to one’s own willpower and *yogic* virtuosity. In advanced stages, the *bhakta*’s mind is naturally permeated with love and surrender to the beloved *Īśvara*. However, these attitudes of love and surrender while performing *japa* are flavors of the meditating mind, they must not agitate it into active thought. The rules of meditation remain the same—the mind must strive to remain fixed without deviation on the repetition of the *japa*: “From wherever the mind wanders, due to its fickle and unsteady nature, one must control it and bring it back under the control of the higher self” (*Gītā* VI.26). So *japa* is not prayer. Of course prayer is most definitely a *bhakti* activity—in fact, Jīva places under this category of *kīrtana* reciting prayers to *Īśvara*, along with expressing feelings of humility and revealing one’s

desires to Him (*anu* 276). But prayer is conventionally a practice that involves an active mind; *japa* is a practice of *citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ*, the complete stilling of all the thoughts of the mind upon the *mantra* (*Yoga Sūtras* I.2, applied to I.27–28).

In Jīva’s tradition, the *nāma-ācārya*, or exemplar of *japa*, is Haridāsa Ṭhākura. Perhaps the most famous Gauḍīya story featuring *japa* involves a young prostitute sent by a malicious king, Rāmacandra Khān, to allure and entice the ascetic Haridāsa away from his *japa* practices. Seeking to secure her spiritual well-being without humiliating her by spurning her advances, the compassionate Haridāsa promises to fulfill her seductive proposals, just as soon as he has finished his daily chanting practice. This, however, consisted of three hundred thousand repetitions of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* noted above, which took all day and night to complete, leaving no time for any liaison with the prostitute. So the promise was renewed the next day. The young lady waited patiently and respectfully, while this went on for three days. On the third day: Bowing to the Ṭhākura and to the *tulasī* (plant sacred to Kṛṣṇa),³⁷ she sat in the doorway and listened to the names, saying, “Hari Hari.” “The names will certainly be finished today,” said Haridāsa, “and today I shall fulfill your desire.” And while he was still at *kīrtana*, the end of the night came. And in the company of the Ṭhākura, the prostitute’s mind was turned. Bowing deeply she fell at the feet of the Ṭhākura, and humbly told him the story of Rāmacandra Khān. “As a prostitute I have committed infinite sins; be merciful and save me, wretched as I am.” Ṭhākura said: “I know all about the Khān. He is ignorant and stupid, so I do not take offense from him. That day [when you came] I was going to go from this place, but I remained for three more days to save you.” The prostitute said, “Be gracious and instruct me; what should I do, that the agonies of *saṁsāra* pass from me?” Ṭhākura said, “Give the goods of your house to a *brāhmaṇa*, then come to this house and remain here. Take the name incessantly and serve *tulasī*, and quickly you will gain the feet of Kṛṣṇa.” So the prostitute took the orders of her guru.... She shaved her head and remained with one cloth in the house, and night and day she took the

name three lakhs [three hundred thousand] times. She served the *tulasī*, fasted, [only] chewing; and as she controlled her senses, *prema* [love of God] manifested itself. She became a famous Vaiṣṇava, a very great person, and many great Vaiṣṇavas went to have *darśana* [a visit] of her. (*Antya-līlā* 3.120–34) Here we see the portrayal of the purifying effects of *mantra* even on those who happen to be merely in the vicinity of the chanter.

Thus although these terms have porous boundaries (as we see with the usage of *kīrtana* in the Haridāsa narrative above, for what is more typically considered *japa*), *kīrtana* usually represents the communal and congregational chanting of *mantras*, the names of *Īśvara*, or brief repeated devotional phrases about *Īśvara*'s activities. *San̐kīrtana* features this even more so—indeed, in the hagiography of Caitanya, the *san̐kīrtana* points to public chanting in the streets accompanied by music and dancing (popularized in the West by a modern branch of the Gauḍīya tradition, ISKCON, better known as the Hare Krishna Movement³⁸). In contrast, *japa*, which focuses on very short *mantras*, is personal, quiet, meditative, and performed in a more secluded and private manner. We can also mention here another term, *bhajana*, which overlaps in significance and content with the term *kīrtana* and is also often a public practice but tends to refer to devotional hymns—that is, entire phrases, sentences, or even long narrative sequences that flow from verse to verse—about the stories of *Īśvara* inspired by the epics and Purāṇas (such as, in the case of Kṛṣṇa, from the *Bhāgavata*'s tenth book). These are often set to more intricate devotional *rāgas* (melodies) and may be accompanied by more sophisticated instrumentation than is the case with *kīrtana*. *Kīrtana*, in partial contrast, tends to feature the basic names and *mantras* associated with the various *Īśvara* forms or very short, simple, and succinct phrases connected with their activities. These are encapsulated in less elaborate melodies repeated over and over again to simple musical accompaniment that involves the participation of larger numbers of people than typically is the case with *bhajana*. But all

these terms overlap considerably.

Finally, since, as with all processes of *bhakti*, the goal is to develop love of *Īśvara*, one should chant the specific names that one holds dear, says Jīva, so that this love (*rāga*) can develop (*anu* 263). In other words, the *mantra* one selects should correspond to the manifestation of *Īśvara* toward whom one is attracted. We will discuss some of the ways such attraction may develop later. Also, as with the first *bhakti yoga* process of *śravaṇa*, the focus of chanting optimally also revolves around the progression of names, forms, qualities, and pastimes.

Smarāṇa (Remembering)

Jīva quotes the following *Bhāgavata* verse as best defining *smarāṇa*, the third practice of *bhakti yoga*: “Yoga has been taught ... as being that by which the mind is withdrawn from everything else, and fixed on Me [Kṛṣṇa]” (XI.13.14). In other words, in *smarāṇa* one thinks of (remembers) Kṛṣṇa at all times. Absorbing all of one’s thoughts in God³⁹ is actually the ultimate goal of *vaidhī bhakti* and repeatedly stressed as the ultimate goal of all *yoga* in the *Gītā*: “Of all *yogīs*, the one who performs *bhakti* to Me with his innermost self absorbed in Me is the best of all those engaged in *yoga* (VI.47); “Listen once more again to my highest, most intimate of all teachings.... Fix your mind on Me and become My *bhakta*” (XVIII.64–65).⁴⁰ Jīva notes that remembrance is possible only if the heart is pure—that is, freed from mundane desires—hence *kīrtana* as a purifying practice is an essential prerequisite to being able to keep *Īśvara* in one’s thoughts at all times. But when the mind is withdrawn from mundane engagements and fixed on God in this way, “Kṛṣṇa ... gives His own self to one who remembers Him” (X.80.11). Thus, where *śravaṇa* is the initiator of *bhakti*, and *kīrtana* the primary active purificatory practice, constant *smarāṇa* is the actual goal.

A comment about the psychological mechanisms of *smarāṇa*: *bhakti* meditation, as with any other type of activity performed by the mind, is a mental construct—that is to say, it consists of creative imaging made of *saṁskāras*. *Saṁskāras* are nothing other than impressions of previous

sense experiences. Since the senses cannot perceive the divine forms of *Īśvara* (for example, see *Gītā* 11.8), the practitioner can only imagine a form made from the imprints of conventional experience. This, incidentally, is why we will find the *Bhāgavata* so frequently provides vivid and colorful personal descriptions of Kṛṣṇa’s forms and ornaments, which become standardized by dint of constant repetition. Such repetition aids in the process of mental imaging during *smaraṇa*. The actual divine form is, of course, made of *Brahman* “stuff” (called *suddha sattva*) transcendent to the senses, but the *yogī* can still construe a form made out of *prakṛtic saṁskāras* (*cintāmaya*) that best corresponds to these descriptions. As with any form or deity, as we will see later in the practice of *arcana*, worship, *Īśvara* can manifest personal presence in that mentally constructed form (which is in fact a deity made of mind stuff) if the endeavor—the *smaraṇa*—is permeated with *bhakti*. Nonetheless, in terms of the psychological mechanics involved, if the text informs us Kṛṣṇa is blue like a monsoon cloud (which is closer to black than blue),⁴¹ we can meditate on Kṛṣṇa’s color only by utilizing a blue of our *prakṛtic* experience. Likewise with His flute, the ingredients in His *līlās*, or anything else—one can draw only from our repertoire of mundane experiences to attempt to conceive of these or to construct a visual narrative when engaging in *smaraṇa* type practices, until one attains an actual vision of God.

However, such practices are no different from that of *jñāna yoga*, where one has to keep the *saṁskāra* of one’s ultimate *ātman* nature always in mind, until the *ātman* is perceived in its own right (*Yoga Sūtras* I.3). This too can only involve fixing the mind on the “idea” of an *ātman*. Even Patañjali’s *citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ*, “stilling of all states of mind”—namely, the proposal to transcend mental imaging altogether—is (until experienced) a mental construct, idea, or ideation. Any thought occurring in the mind can be made only of *saṁskāras*, which are in turn made of *sattva guṇa*—one of the three base metaphysical components of *prakṛti*. The thoughts themselves are not *Brahman* stuff. Likewise with *Īśvara smaraṇa* in *bhakti*. We will discuss this further in “Hierarchies of

Bliss” and also the notion of divine presence permeating some form made of a *prakṛtic* substance—be it a mental form, as in *smaraṇa*, or a form made of some other substance including metal or stone—in the process of *arcana*, deity worship, the fifth of the nine practices.

Also, readers familiar with the *Yoga Sūtras* may be reminded here of Patañjali’s *Īśvara-praṇidhāna*, “dedication to *Īśvara*” (I.23–27). *Īśvara* is highly recommended in the *Yoga Sūtras* as the best object upon which to fix the mind after it has been withdrawn from everything else⁴² (although the *bhakti* element in the *Yoga Sūtras* is what I sometimes refer to as *Bhakti Lite* in comparison with the *bhakti XXX Extra-Strength* of the *Bhāgavata*!). In fact, Jīva expands *smaraṇa* into a five-step sequence that closely mirrors the three highest limbs of the progressive eight-limb (*aṣṭāṅga*) schema in the *Yoga Sūtras*, except with bolstered devotional flavorings (*anu* 278). *Smaraṇa* itself, to think of *Īśvara* according to one’s inclination, initiates Jīva’s fivefold sequence. This is followed by the second step, *dhāraṇā* (Patañjali’s sixth limb), withdrawal of the mind from external objects and focus of it on *Īśvara* in a general way; then the third step, *dhyāna* (Patañjali’s seventh limb), contemplation on *Īśvara*’s name, form, qualities, and pastimes; the fourth step, *dhruvānusmṛti*, fixed remembrance of *Īśvara* flowing without interruption like a continuous flow of nectar (interjected between Patañjali’s sixth and seventh limbs);⁴³ and eventually the fifth and final step, *samādhi* (Patañjali’s eighth limb), when only the object of awareness is manifest, without any subjective or self-awareness. However, and very important, unlike the general understanding of *samādhi* as reflected in the *Yoga Sūtras*,⁴⁴ where the ultimate goal is for awareness to be immersed in its own nature (*svarūpa*, *Yoga Sūtras* I.3, the *ātman/Brahman* of Vedānta), the ultimate object of awareness in *bhakti samādhi*, as in all its preliminary stages, is exclusively *Īśvara*. In other words, in the state of *samādhi*, says Jīva, a person may have a direct vision of *Īśvara*. This is not a mental image made of *saṁskāras*, but a direct perception or experience of *Īśvara* as a personal distinct Being with full transcendent form and qualities made of pure *Brahman*⁴⁵ appearing present as an object of consciousness

(internally and/or externally, as we will see in the Tale of Prince Dhruva) before the awareness of the meditating *bhakta*. The *bhāgavatas* claim that the bliss ensuing from such a vision far eclipses the bliss experienced when awareness becomes reimmersed in its own nature, which is the goal of generic yoga.

Thus, raising a theme we will later discuss at length, Vyāsa preferred to immerse his consciousness in Kṛṣṇa's pastimes than in the bliss of the *ātman*: "Although he was fixed in the bliss of the self and was devoid of any other thought, his heart was attracted to the enchanting *līlās* of the infallible Kṛṣṇa" (XII.12.68). When Nārada urges Vyāsa to "recall, by means of *samādhi*, the activities of Kṛṣṇa" (I.5.13)—in other words, to engage in *smaraṇa*—Vyāsa does so, and "in his mind, which, completely purified by the practice of *bhakti yoga*, was fully concentrated, he saw that perfect Person" (I.7.4).⁴⁶ This direct vision of God is the fifth and final stage of *smaraṇa* and, hence, of *bhakti yoga*, in Jīva's five-stage sequence.

Perhaps the most visually replete and startlingly extreme example of such visions in Kṛṣṇa literature is, again, exhibited by Caitanya Mahāprabhu (Prabhu, below). We should note that while some of the ecstatic bodily symptoms that he exhibits appear almost grotesque to conventional perception, they are physical manifestations of the highest states of internal ecstasy—as we noted previously, the material body is poorly equipped to handle unfamiliar dosages of ecstatic experience: The whole night long, Prabhu sang *kīrtana* loudly. Suddenly Prabhu heard the sound of Kṛṣṇa's flute, and absorbed in his *bhāva* [devotional meditation], he left that place. Though the doors were barred, absorbed in that *bhāva* Prabhu went outside.... Then Svarūpa Gosvāmī, taking the *bhaktas* with him, lit a lamp and searched for Prabhu. Searching here and there, they went eventually to the lion-gate, where they found Prabhu among the cows. His hands and feet were pulled into his stomach; he had the shape of a tortoise. There was froth on his lips, his whole body trembled, and there were tears in his eyes. Fallen unconscious, he was like a *kuṣmāṇḍa* fruit; externally he was stiff and

rigid; inwardly he was overwhelmed with *ānanda* [bliss].... Many tried hard, but he remained unconscious. The *bhaktas* raised Prabhu up and brought him home. Loudly in his ear they sang Kṛṣṇa *saṅkīrtana*, and after a long time Mahāprabhu regained consciousness. When he came back to consciousness, his hands and feet came out again, and his body was as it had been before. Getting up, Prabhu sat down and looked this way and that, and said to Svarūpa, “Where have you brought me? I heard the sound of the flute and went to Vṛndāvana, and I saw in the pasture Vrajendranandana [Kṛṣṇa] playing his flute. By the sound of the flute, he secretly brought Rādhā to the *kuñja*-bower, and Kṛṣṇa went to the *kuñja* to play there. I followed after him, and my ears were conquered by the sound of his ornaments. There he sported with the *gopīs*, laughing and joking, and hearing the sound of his voice, my ears were thrilled. Then you all came, making a great uproar, and took me away by force.” (*Antya-līlā* 17.8–26)⁴⁷

We will see that Kṛṣṇa’s eternal divine *Brahman* realm called Goloka, where Caitanya’s consciousness was transported in this account, both is coextensive with this realm of *prakṛti* and transcends it. It is *Brahman* (pure consciousness), but an expression of *Brahman* with divine forms and qualities (*saguṇa Brahman*). We will discuss this later in detail, but for now we will just note that such accessing of the *saguṇa Brahman* dimension and direct perception of God is the highest stage of *samādhi* in the Kṛṣṇa tradition. This is a very far cry from the contentless self-awareness of the *ātman* that is the goal of generic Patañjali-type *samādhi* and most *jñāna* traditions.

Pāda-sevana (Service to Īśvara’s Feet)

Pāda-sevana, the fourth practice, has various synonyms, Jīva points out, such as *sevā* and *paricaryā*, all of which denote service to Īśvara. He does not have much to say about what this fourth category of *bhakti yoga* comprises in terms of specifics, but we can recall from “Definition of *Bhakti*” that most of the definitions of *bhakti* scattered in various texts featured the ideal of service, which we noted is synonymous with love.

While the word “service” sometimes carries a negative connotation associated with servitude, we can understand from our own human relationships that the more we deeply love another person, the more we try to please him or her with service.

Since in traditional Sanskrit theological exposition all practices must be supported by reference to the sacred texts, Jīva, as always, strives to illustrate the practice of *pāda-sevana* by quoting the *Bhāgavata*: “For one who is faithful and desires to hear, attraction to the stories of Vāsudeva (Kṛṣṇa) develops by means of service to the sages and assisting great saints, and dwelling in holy places” (I.2.16). The *Gītā* also uses the term *sevā* specifically in reference to service rendered to the accomplished practitioners in gratitude for receiving guidance and instruction: “Through humble submission, inquiry and service, the wise, those who have perceived the Truth, will instruct you in knowledge” (IV.34). Service to such *guru* figures who impart knowledge is all-important in almost all *bhakti* traditions, but service to the *bhaktas* in general is also greatly stressed, as will be discussed in a later section. Jīva adds to this various other activities that constitute service: seeing, touching, and circumambulating the Deity; following the Deity in temple processions; and visiting *Īśvara*’s temples, the *Gaṅgā* river, and holy places associated with *Īśvara*’s incarnations and deeds. These types of *pāda-sevana* activities are some of the most visible expressions of *bhakti* in India, as is the case with other devotional traditions of the world.

A much-loved example of service in the hagiography of Caitanya Mahāprabhu was demonstrated by King Pratāparudra of Orissa (East India) during the famous annual cart festival in the town of Purī. Here, Kṛṣṇa in the form of the massive Jagannātha Deity leaves His temple and is transported on gigantic chariots (from which derives the English-borrowing “juggernaut”) to the Guṇḍicā temple, in reenactment of Kṛṣṇa’s meeting with the *gopīs* in Kurukṣetra:⁴⁸

Pratāparudra himself, with his ministers, was among the followers of Mahāprabhu to see the *vijaya* [triumphal procession]. There

were powerful personal attendants [of Jagannātha], strong as mad elephants, who with their hands brought Jagannātha out for the *vijaya*.... Who has the strength to cause ... Jagannātha to move? By his own desire he went on his pleasure-trip [to the Guṇḍicā temple].... Then Prataparudra performed his personal service: with a golden broom he swept the path. He moistened the path with water and sandalwood; he performed these menial tasks [even though] he sat on the royal lion-throne. Though he is elevated, the king performs menial services, and thus is a receptacle for the grace of Jagannātha. Seeing these services, Mahāprabhu was delighted, and because of these services, [the king] gained the grace of Mahāprabhu. (*Madhya Līlā*, 13.3–17) The descendants of the king still reenact this service of sweeping the road before the procession every year.

As with the previous three processes of *bhakti*, service is purifying: “The attraction to serve His lotus feet, growing day by day, immediately washes away from the ascetics the dirt accumulated over unlimited lifetimes, just like the *Gaṅgā* river does” (IV.21.31). And service, too, like all forms of *bhakti*, is fully satisfying, hence *bhaktas* “do not desire any favor other than the service of Kṛṣṇa’s feet” (X.51.55).⁴⁹ We wish to repeat here that the notion of service, which may carry with it negative connotations in other contexts, is almost synonymous with love and devotion in the *Bhāgavata*. To love is to render acts of devotion that please the beloved. *Pāda-sevana* is essentially this. And true love must be reciprocal between lover and beloved. Consider, in this light, the following verses spoken by Viṣṇu, which we will encounter in the Tale of King Ambarīṣa: O *brāhmaṇa*! I am under the control of my *bhaktas*—it is as if I have no independence. My heart has been captured by the saints (*sādhus*) and *bhaktas*, and I, in turn, am dear to the *bhakta* community. Without My *bhaktas* and the *sādhus*, I do not desire even My own self, O *brāhmaṇa*, nor Śrī, the Goddess of Fortune, who is very intimate to Me. I am the supreme goal for My *bhaktas*. They have renounced spouse, home, sons, great wealth, and their very life and approached Me for

shelter. How am I capable of rejecting them? The *sādhus*, who see all beings with equal vision, have their hearts bound to Me. They control Me with their devotion, just as a chaste wife controls a true husband. Satisfied by My service, they do not even desire the four types of liberation,⁵⁰ which are available through service, to say nothing of any other temporal thing. The *sādhus* are My heart, and I am the heart of the *sādhus*. They do not know anything other than Me, and I can barely think of anything other than them. (IX.4.63–68) **Arcana (Worship)**

Arcana here refers specifically to deity worship, certainly the most visible aspect of *bhakti* and of Hinduism in general. Jīva spends some time on it: [Worship is] the faithful effort in installing, either alone or in coordination with others, My Deity (*arcā*); the work of [providing them with] gardens, groves, pleasure grounds, and the construction of temples and towns; rendering service to My temples sincerely like a servant by cleaning, plastering with cow-dung, and creating ornamental designs; and in being free from ego and pride, and not advertising one's acts.... Whatever is considered desirable in the world, and whatever is held most dear to the self, that should be offered to Me [manifest as the Deity]. By this, one attains the eternal. (XI.11.38–41) The primary traditional Sanskrit textual sources that deal with the prescriptive details of deity worship extensively are genres called the *Āgamas* and *Pañcarātras*. The various procedures described in these texts begin with invoking (*āvāhana*) the presence of *Īśvara* into the Deity and thereafter caring for Him with love and devotion. Here, again, an important metaphysical consideration that needs to be established before considering the specifics of *arcana* is that the Deity—as with the *mantra*—is considered nondifferent from *Īśvara*'s own form. It is not a symbol, substitute, or some sort of mental prop: *Īśvara*'s actual presence is invoked in *āvāhana*. This is somewhat similar to the notion of “transubstantiation” in Catholicism, where the bread and wine are considered to be transformed into the body and blood of Christ actually, not figuratively. Similarly, *Īśvara* is considered to be personally present

within the Deity, by permeating or “merging” (*līna*) into it. Jīva quotes the *Hayaśīrṣa Pañcarātra*, here: “Whatever may be Your transcendent nature, and whatever may be Your form made of pure consciousness (*jñāna-māyā*), may all that together, merged into this [Deity] body, awaken”⁵¹ (*anu* 286). The Deity, he continues, is a special seat within which *Īśvara* manifests (*anu* 289).⁵² We should thus avoid using terms such as “statue,” with its implication of a lifeless representational object made of inert matter such as marble that copies or represents something beyond itself—or worse, “idol,” with its Abrahamic implication of a false god.

The typical objection to all this raised by, for example, certain missionaries in colonial India was that the Supreme all-pervading Godhead cannot surely be reduced to a meager lifeless stone or material representation; God is unlimited and infinite. How can one presume to imagine that the all-pervading infinite transcendent Being has been confined within a limited, inert, base material substance?

What is idolatry but a practical treason against Reason, the royal crown of our manhood, the setting up of the sensuous Imagination in its stead? If, then, any vision of God, as the Being who transcends all sense, be possible in any degree to man, it must be attained through the inner and not through the outer eye.... Thought, not sense, must eventually be recognized as the true organ of religion.... The Infinite and the Eternal, however they are to be apprehended, cannot possibly be represented in finite form by even the most perfect efforts of human art.... If ever man could construct a material image of God, it would only be possible if He showed the pattern of Himself on the highest mount of inspiration, but the Hindoo idolmaker has had no such vision ... and can only draw the forms of his imagery out of himself, and his images can only at the best represent his own subjective moods of feeling or aspiration, and not the known, transcendent, divine reality. (Hastie 1882, 15–17) The Hindu response to this, predictably, is that it is

Hastie’s assumptions that limit God: it is precisely because God is unlimited that, in addition to manifesting in thought as Hastie would require, He can not only become manifest to the sensual eyes, should He so choose, but also become manifest in stone, and disallowing this possibility is itself curtailing the omnipotency of the Supreme Being. As Jīva puts it, although *Īśvara* is all-pervading, he particularizes Himself in the form of the *śālagrāma* stones,⁵³ and other such forms (*anu* 294). And, again, it is *Īśvara*’s very unlimitedness that allows Him to manifest in unlimited deities simultaneously, while still maintaining a full presence and personal form in His unlimited divine *Brahman* realms of *Vaikuṇṭha* and *Goloka* (or, more precisely, unlimited divine presences in unlimited divine realms, as we will discover). And at the same time, *Īśvara* is both omnipresent and omniconstitutional in all things of *prakṛti* (*Gītā* X.41). Of course, even the stone is a product of *prakṛti*, Kṛṣṇa’s impersonal *śakti* (“power”), and in this sense also Kṛṣṇa, but the Deity is more than this. This is not some Hindu variant of pantheism. While the stone substance of the Deity is made of Kṛṣṇa’s *śakti*, Kṛṣṇa as *Śaktimān* (“possessor of *śakti*”)—the distinct personal Godhead who is the source of all powers, as will be discussed in “The Object of *Bhakti*”—enters into and transforms the metaphysics of the stone, converting it into a vehicle of divine presence. Yet *Īśvara* is not confined by this act of grace, simultaneously remaining a distinct independent Being.

We might add here one other consideration raised by a Hindu more or less contemporary with Hastie against the latter’s assumption that “thought, not sense, must eventually be recognized as the true organ of religion.” Bhaktivinoda Thakur’s argument here is subtle: The Supreme Lord does not have a material form, but is endowed with a transcendent spiritual form called *sat-cit-ānanda-vigraha*.⁵⁴ The fullest manifestation of this transcendent form cannot be perceived by the conditioned *jīvas* [*ātmans*]. For this reason, in whatever fashion man conceives of God in this world, his conception must assume a degree of idolatry ... Śrī Kṛṣṇa

can be perceived in the heart, to some extent, through the help of divine love. When this form is perceived in the mind ... it assumes a greater degree of phenomenality, while being served through the body and senses in physical form, *Śrī Mūrti* [the Deity] assumes the greatest level of phenomenality (quoted in Das, 192).

To understand the full import of this statement, we must bear in mind that throughout much of Indic thought, the mind is considered to be a nonconscious material element extraneous to the real self. In the Sāṅkhya metaphysics of the *Bhāgavata* (which, with some sect-specific taxonomic variants here and there, became the dominant metaphysical and physical descriptive model of reality of the Vedānta and Purāṇa traditions), mind and intelligence are material substances that do not differ in ultimate essence from the other material substances—the gross elements of earth, water, fire, air, and ether—except that they are more subtle in nature (which simply means they contain more of the *sattva guṇa* and less of the *tamas*, discussed in the next section). They are all *prakṛti*, matter, and external coverings of the *ātman*.

So Bhaktivinoda's argument, then, is that *any* statement or notion emanating from human thought pertaining to God—such as that God is “love,” or “good,” or “all-powerful,” or “almighty,” or “just,” or “beyond human comprehension,” or anything whatsoever including “God is,” all and any such declarations—is idolatry, if one is to adopt the logic of those theistic traditions critical of Hindu deity worship. This is because all such attributes are constructions formed by the mind or intellect, and the mind and intellect are *prakṛtic* matter in *Bhāgavata* metaphysics; they merely contain more of the *sattva guṇa* than the *tamas guṇa*.⁵⁵ Indeed, conceiving of God *in any way whatsoever* means, by definition, constructing a conceptual (that is, a mental or intellectual) material image of Him, but this is still subtle matter distinct from the Deity. Thus, for Bhaktivinoda, whether the image is made of the material elements of stone or whether it is a conceptual image made of thought, “there is no difference between the two because even mind and thought are

material” (Das, 193). Therefore, taking this to its logical conclusion, *there is no other way to conceive of, or discuss, God except through image worship*: “Image worship is therefore the foundation of human religion” (ibid.). Hindus construct a variety of images of stone and other denser material substances in addition to constructing the variety of intellectual images of God evidenced in the elaborate theologies of the subcontinent; other theistic traditions have restricted themselves to worshipping intellectual images: both are worshipping images.

In any event, returning to the logic of *arcana* from the point of view of its adherents, just as our own *ātman* permeates our physical body made of the material elements and animates it with consciousness, so *Īśvara* the Supreme *Ātman* permeates the physical form of the Deity, which is also made of the elements, and animates it with divine presence. The difference, of course, is we are forced into a body not by any immediate choice of our own, but according to our *karma*,⁵⁶ whereas *Īśvara* enters the Deity as an act of grace bound only by *bhakti*. This act of grace is so that the *bhakta*, enveloped in matter and thus unable to perceive his or her own *ātman*, to say nothing of perceiving the Supreme *Ātman*, can worship *Īśvara* directly in a very immediate personal manner when *Īśvara* manifests in a material form. It is to facilitate *arcana*, worship, that *Īśvara* does so, and indeed, in the twelfth-century South Indian Vaiṣṇava tradition stemming from the theologian Rāmānuja, *Īśvara* in the Deity (*arcā-vigraha*) is one of the five types of *avatāra* (divine descent). In his *Laghu-Bhāgavatāmṛta*, Rūpa defines *avatāra* as a form of the Lord “manifesting in the universe to accomplish a new purpose either personally or through some other agency” (II.1.2).⁵⁷ And as is the case with *mantra*—which is a sonic *avatāra* (*nāma-avatāra*), and indeed all forms of *bhakti yoga*—*Īśvara* reveals His presence in the Deity in proportion to the sincerity of the *bhakti* rendered. And the same, of course, holds true for the Goddess *Īśvarī* forms.

In fact, it is very common in India, almost ubiquitous, in fact, to find stories associated with local temples, where the Deity interacts with His or Her devotees in various active and very personable ways. One of the

best-known stories in Jīva’s tradition, for example, is that of Sākṣī-Gopāla (Kṛṣṇa the “Witness”). The context of the story is of a promise that was made before the Gopāla (Kṛṣṇa) Deity in Vṛndāvana between two *brāhmaṇas* from the south of India, while on pilgrimage in the north. Upon their return home down south, this promise was unwillingly broken because of family pressure by the elder *brāhmaṇa*. The younger *brāhmaṇa* therefore returns north to request that the Deity come back south to his village in order to bear witness to the promise made such that the elder *brāhmaṇa* would not incur the sin of breaking a promise. Note the very personal and almost banterlike tone between the devotee and Deity in the following passage—the *brāhmaṇa* even admonishing the Deity not to commit a sin! This is typical of the relationship between devotee and Deity and so reflective of the intimate “real life” relationship with *Īśvara* that lies at the heart of *bhakti yoga*: Then the younger *brāhmaṇa* went to Vṛndāvana and bowing to the ground he related the whole tale [to the Deity of Kṛṣṇa] ... “that the promise of a *brāhmaṇa* be broken—this is very bad. Knowing these things, bear witness ... he who knows and does not bear witness commits a sin.” ... Kṛṣṇa said: “No one has heard of an image moving.” The *brāhmaṇa* said, “[In that case], as an image, how do you speak words? You are not an image, you are the manifest Vrajendranāndana⁵⁸ [Kṛṣṇa]. Will you do this thing, which is not done, for the *brāhmaṇa*?” Laughing, Gopāla [Kṛṣṇa] said, “Listen, O *brāhmaṇa*, I shall follow after you. Do not turn around to look at me; if you look at me I shall remain in the place [where you looked]. You will only hear the sound of my ankle bells, and from that sound you will know that I am moving.” The next day, having begged leave, the *brāhmaṇa* departed, and Gopāla followed after him.... Moving in this way, the *brāhmaṇa* came to his own country, and nearing his village, he reflected in his mind ... “I shall go and say to the people that the witness has come.” ... Reflecting thus, the *brāhmaṇa* turned around and looked; and smiling Gopāla ... was there ... when they heard of it, all the people were astonished. They all came to see the witness, and when they saw Gopāla, they bowed to the ground.... And the king of

that country came, hearing of the wonderful thing, and he gained the highest pleasure when he saw Gopāla. The king built a temple there, and caused the service to be instituted. It was called Sākṣīgopāla [Gopāla the witness], and it became famous. (*Madhya Līlā* V.86–117) Countless temples on the subcontinent, both majestic and pan-Indian, as well as humble and local, have such narratives associated with them.

Deity worship lies at the very core of all forms of *bhakti* practices of real-life Hinduism, in terms both of the private practices of dedicated individuals and, more visibly, of practices in temple settings. Its description thus merits quoting at length: One who wishes to speedily cut away the knot in the heart [desire] of the transcendent *ātman* should worship Lord Keśava (Kṛṣṇa) according to the prescriptions expressed in the Tantra texts.⁵⁹ Upon receiving the permission of the *ācārya* (*guru*), and after having received instruction from him, one should worship the Supreme Being in a Deity form that reflects one's personal preference. In a clean state, seated facing [the Deity], after purifying this lump of a body by *prāṇāyāma* (breath control) and other practices, as well as protecting it by invoking various names of *Īśvara* into different body parts (*nyāsa*), one should worship Hari. One should prepare the paraphernalia, surface, oneself, and the Deity; consecrate the seat; perform *nyāsa* to one's heart and other parts of the body;⁶⁰ and prepare the ingredients for worship such as water for washing the feet, *etc.* Then, with concentration, one should invoke the presence of the Divinity either in the Deity or in the heart, and perform worship with the *mūla-mantra*.⁶¹ One should worship the various limbs of the Deity, as well as His associates,⁶² with: the *mantra* corresponding to that Deity's specific form;⁶³ foot washing water, welcome beverage, and mouthwash, *etc.*; then bathing, clothing, and ornaments; then scents, flowers, unbroken grains, and garlands, as well as incense and ghee lamps. Having completed the *pūjā* (ritual worship) according to the prescriptions, one should offer obeisance to Hari. Meditating on oneself as made of Him,⁶⁴ one should worship the Deity form (*mūrti*). One should place the

remnants on one's head, and respectfully replace the Deity back in its place.⁶⁵ In this way, one who worships *Īśvara*, the soul of everything, in fire, the sun, water, and other such natural phenomenon, and in the guest, or in one's own heart, is quickly liberated. (XI.3.47–55) This may all sound rather complex and ritualistic, but the whole idea is to develop *prema*, divine love (XI.27.32). Ultimately, it is not rituals and offerings that count (since *Īśvara* owns everything anyway), but *bhakti*. As Kṛṣṇa states in the *Gītā* (twice repeating the word *bhakti* in the same verse for emphasis): “If one offers Me a flower, leaf, fruit, or water with *bhakti*, I accept that offering of *bhakti* from one sincerely devoted to Me” (IX.26). Or, in the words of the *Bhāgavata*: “Even just water offered to Me faithfully with *bhakti* is dear to Me ... but even great abundance offered by one who is not a *bhakta* does not cause satisfaction” (XI.27.18–19). It is the internal meditation of love that is the goal, not the external forms of *pūjā*.⁶⁶

In fact, despite the ritualistically elaborate, caste-and gender-exclusivistic, “high” forms *arcana* can take in elite Hindu orthopraxy, its expressions are, in fact, highly flexible, allowing anyone, anywhere, to engage in some form of this practice in modest, intimate modes. So, for example, the Deity can be made from any among eight substances most readily available, with a mental option ensuring that there is no one who cannot partake of this process even if deprived of all material facilities: “There are eight kinds of deities (*pratimā*); they may be made of: stone, wood, metal, sandalwood or mud, paint [a picture], sand, mind, or precious gem.” If one has material facilities, then one should offer one's beloved the very best one can afford, but if one is utterly impoverished, a mere offering of heartfelt *bhakti* is perfection: “My worship in the Deity should be performed with the choicest articles, but it can be performed by my sincere *bhakta* with whatever is available, or even just in the mind” (XI.27.15).⁶⁷ The important thing is to engage worship as a practice to assist in the cultivation of *bhakti*, not for ostentatious display.

Arcana is especially recommended for householders, says Jīva: “This

path, by which the Supreme Person is worshipped faithfully with one's wealth obtained by pure means, brings good fortune to the householders" (X.84.37). This is so because householders are usually more challenged in keeping the mind always fixed on *Īśvara* than those who have renounced all worldly possessions, for obvious reasons. And channeling their wealth into deity worship helps them curb the tendency to become miserly, says Jīva. Moreover, if undertaken according to the prescriptions, deity worship assists them in cultivating the mental *yogic* discipline of strict regulation (*anu* 283).

As with *bhakti* in general, worship can either be performed purely, with no motive other than to cultivate devotion for *Īśvara*, or be mixed with *karma*, desire for some personal material gain. We will discuss this type of "mixed *bhakti*" later, but Jīva notes at this point that those whose worship of the Deity is mixed tend to be people who are merely blindly following social norms picked up from here or there, or following family traditions and so forth (*anu* 284). However, the ideal, as Kṛṣṇa Himself states, is to become free of personal desire and seek only *Īśvara*: "It is through the practice of *bhakti yoga* without motive, that one attains Me" (XI.27.53). Either way, whatever be the motive: "Worshipping Me in the above ways through the path of *kriyā yoga* by means of either Vedic or Tantric⁶⁸ rites, a person attains from Me the desired success, both in this life and the next" (XI.27.49).

There are many other practices subsumed under the category of *arcana*, says Jīva, such as celebrating festive days like Kṛṣṇa's birthday, observing vows during the months of *Kārtika*,⁶⁹ fasting from grains on the bimonthly *ekādaśī* days,⁷⁰ wearing *tilak* sacred clay,⁷¹ and others (*anu* 298–99). We can briefly mention residence in sacred places or the very commonly undertaken activity of pilgrimage to them. We have discussed how *Īśvara* can manifest in sound and in the Deity, so, similarly, in many Hindu *bhakti* traditions, places associated with *Īśvara* represent yet another type of divine manifestation: "Lord Hari is eternally present in Mathurā [where He took birth]" (X.1.28); "Even today, out of affection, Lord Hari appears to His devotees who reside in that holy place, in

whatever form that they desire” (V.7.2). Indeed, so beneficial is living in holy places to the development of *bhakti* that Rūpa, who personally resided in Kṛṣṇa’s childhood abode of Vṛndāvana (Vraj), along with Jīva and the other *Gosvāmīs*, wrote the following in his *Upadeśāmṛta*: “Living in Vraj, and following those who are attached to Kṛṣṇa, one should spend all one’s time gradually engaging one’s mind and tongue in remembering and chanting the name, form, and deeds of Kṛṣṇa. This is the essence of spiritual instruction” (8).

One further element that Jīva discusses under the rubric of *arcana*, which is very much stressed in this tradition, is not offending the *bhaktas*: “Hari ... does not accept worship from those who commit offense to the righteous [devotees] who want nothing [but Him]. The intelligence of such people is perverted due to intoxication from learning, wealth, family, or accomplishments” (IV.31.21). Such offenses “destroy everything,” says Jīva (*anu* 301). The Tale of King Ambarīṣa in part 2 will illustrate this point. The *bhakta* is as dear to *Īśvara*—and *Īśvarī*—as they are to the *bhakta*. Of course, Kṛṣṇa favors no one, as He states in the *Gītā*, but this indicates that no one is excluded from the opportunity of becoming a *bhakta*. If one avails oneself of this opportunity by choosing to turn to Him in a devotional manner, one is favored, hence the frequent statements that *bhaktas* are especially dear to Kṛṣṇa (*Gītā* IX.29–32).

But, in fact, while the *bhaktas* are as dear to *Īśvara* as He is to them, all living entities are nothing other than manifestations of *Īśvara*. Hence, Jīva adds to all this that the highest form of *arcana* is the worship of all living entities.⁷² He points out that worshipping the Deity while offending other living entities is useless: Therefore, some perform worship to Hari (Kṛṣṇa) faithfully and reverentially in the form of the Deity, but, despite being performed, worship does not provide any benefit for one who hates his fellow beings. The bodies of men, animals, sages, and celestials have been created by Hari, and it is He who then dwells in these bodies (*pureṣu*) in the form of the *jīva*; hence He is called *puruṣa*. (VII.14.37–40)⁷³

The idea here is that the *ātman* within all beings is a part of *Īśvara*, as is the body within which the *ātman* is embodied. To recognize *Īśvara* in the Deity but not in all beings because of ignorance is offensive to *Īśvara*. Kṛṣṇa ends the *Uddhava Gītā* in book 11 on a similar note, stressing that seeing all beings as nothing other than *Īśvara* is in fact the highest form of worship: One should perceive Me as manifest in all beings and in oneself.... A *paṇḍita* is considered to be one who sees everything equally, whether it be a *brāhmaṇa*,⁷⁴ a member of the *Pukkaśa* tribe, a thief, one devoted to *brāhmaṇas*, the sun, a spark of fire, the gentle or the cruel. Rivalry, envy, abuse, and ego quickly disappear from a person who constantly reflects upon the essence of all people as being Me.... Until [the ability] to see Me as the essence of all living beings develops, one should worship Me with the activities of the body, mind, and speech.... I definitely consider this [attitude]—that the essence of all living entities is in Me—to be the most efficacious of all practices involving the activities of one’s body, speech, and mind.” (XI.29.12–19) **Vandana (Offering Respect)**

Jīva has little to say about this limb, noting that *vandana* overlaps with the previous practice of worship. *Vandana* is the attitudinal and functional equivalent of genuflection in Catholicism and usually refers to bowing or offering prostrations to *Īśvara* (as manifest, for instance, in the Deity, sacred text, or holy place) or to the *guru* or the *bhaktas*. He comments that there are some *bhaktas* who simply feel unworthy of directly serving the Deity, and these prefer to meditate on Him and engage in the practices of *vandana*.⁷⁵ The humble *bhakta* perceives *Īśvara*’s compassion in all situations and thus becomes blissful, says Jīva.

As an aside, one can still find ascetics today who circumambulate the holy town of Vṛndāvana, where Kṛṣṇa spent His childhood, by performing *vandana* along the entire circumference. The distance is approximately ten kilometers, and there are those who perform obeisance to this form of Kṛṣṇa manifest as sacred space by means of a full *daṇḍavat*: an elongated prostration on the ground with arms

extended. They place a stone where their fingers reach and then begin the next prostration from that spot, this time placing the stone at the new spot reached by the fingers at the next *daṇḍavat* (approximately six or seven feet farther). They thus circumambulate the entire circumference of the holy place, performing an ongoing sequence of fully prostrated *vandanas* in this way, and may spend weeks before finishing (one can see extreme versions of this where a person performs a *vandana* of 108⁷⁶ *daṇḍavats* in one spot before moving to the next). While this is a form of *tapas* (austerity) and may also, perhaps more often than not, reflect the “mixed” *bhakti* of which Jīva will speak later (that is, performed in the hope of some boon), it nonetheless is still a form of *vandana* to *Īśvara* present as holy place.

Dāśya (Servitorship)

Here too Jīva has little to say, as this practice overlaps with the others—in fact, we may have noticed by now that these nine practices of *bhakti* have porous boundaries between them. He defines *dāśya* as considering oneself to be a servant of Viṣṇu. As an example of the attitude of servitorship, Jīva selects Uddhava’s statement: “We are your servants, and, since we partake of your remnants—the garlands, ointments, clothes, decorations, and food enjoyed by you—we will surpass *māyā*” (XI.7.46). The remnants of the Deity, such as the garlands and other items mentioned here, are highly valued tokens of divine grace in *bhakti* practice. Typically, any person visiting a temple and having *darśana* (seeing the Deity) will receive some consumable item from the officiating *brāhmaṇa* (priest), if only a few drops of sacred water. For more fortunate visitors, a garland or more lavish array of foodstuffs that had been previously offered to the Deity might be forthcoming, or some other item such as mentioned in the verse. In sum, *dāśya* is an attitude of service and, as practice, perhaps best understood as the mental vigilance invested in cultivating this attitude. Where the fourth practice of *bhakti*, *pāda-sevana*, refers to actual physical acts of service, *dāśya*—and the next practice, friendship—refers more to states of mind. Perhaps we can

consider these two to be internal practices that are expressed externally through the other practices. We will again touch upon *dāśya* in the discussion on *bhāva* (loving mood) below and will find illustrations of it in the stories from the tenth book in part 3.

Sakhya (Friendship)

As with *dāśya*, servitorship, the practice of *sakhya*, friendship, involves a state of mind (*bhāva*), which in general terms, says Jīva, entails wishing someone's well-being. In *bhakti* it is reciprocal, as Hari is the well-wisher of all by supplying material facilities for the needs of the internal and external senses, as well as by bestowing pure love for God. It is thus not very difficult to perform, continues Jīva, because *Īśvara*'s feelings of well-being for His *bhaktas* are eternal (*anu* 306). We will discuss the theology of *bhāva*, which will include the *bhāvas* of both *sakhya* and *dāśya*, in more detail under *rāgānugā bhakti* below, drawing from Rūpa's *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*. We will also encounter the delightful exemplars of *sakhya* in some of the stories we have included in this volume from the tenth book. At this point, Jīva simply draws our attention to a couple of quotes mentioning *sakhya*, as per his method in exemplifying all the elements of *bhakti* he selects for analysis with verses from the *Bhāgavata*: "See the good fortune, O just see the good fortune of Nanda the cowherder and the residents of Vraj! Their friend is the supreme bliss, the eternal absolute *Brahman*!" (X.14.32); "The friends of the infallible Kṛṣṇa, who are peaceful, equanimous, pure, and affectionate to all beings, easily attain Kṛṣṇa's abode" (IV.12.37).

Ātma-nivedana (Self-Surrender)

The last on the list of nine practices, self-surrender, says Jīva, entails "offering everything to the Lord, from one's body to one's pure *ātman*" (*anu* 309). This means the cessation of any self-striving, and dedicating all one's activities to, and focusing one's efforts on *Īśvara*. It can be compared with the selling of a cow, he continues: once sold and given away, the seller invests no more effort in its maintenance, as this has become the responsibility of the purchaser (*anu* 309). Likewise, the

devotee considers himself or herself the property of *Īśvara* and has full faith and dependence on *Īśvara* for all material necessities. In such a state of surrender to *Īśvara*, says Jīva, bodily functions, dressing, and so on are undertaken simply for service, not for any personal interest or motive (see *Gītā* V.9–10 for an expression of this state).

Rukmiṇī, one of Kṛṣṇa’s queens, is selected by Jīva as exemplifying the mood of this ninth practice of *bhakti*: “I have clearly chosen You as a husband, dear Kṛṣṇa, and I have hereby surrendered myself to You as wife” (X.52.39). But perhaps the more classic passage viewed as most representative of the extensiveness of *ātma-nivedana*, this state of total self-surrender, is one we will find in the Tale of King Ambarīṣa: He engaged his mind in [meditating on] the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa; his words in describing the qualities of Vaikuṇṭha, Viṣṇu’s divine *Brahman* adode; his hands in cleaning the temple of Hari and other such acts; and his ears in hearing the beautiful accounts of Acyuta [Kṛṣṇa]. He engaged his eyes in seeing the temples and deities of Mukunda [Kṛṣṇa], the limbs of his body in touching the bodies of the servants of God, his sense of smell in the fragrance of the beautiful *tulāsi* plant [offered to] the Lord’s lotus feet, and his sense of taste in [the food] offered to God. He used his feet in frequenting the places touched by the feet of Hari, his head in offering obeisance to the feet of Hṛṣīkeśa [Kṛṣṇa], and his desire in service rather than in the fulfillment of sensual desires. He did this to develop affection for those who have taken shelter of Viṣṇu, whose glories are supreme. (IX.4.18–20) After outlining similar examples of those who have attained *bhakti* for Him through this ninth practice of *ātma-nivedana*, Kṛṣṇa Himself concludes: “What other goal is there left for such a person to attain?!” (XI.19.24).

We remind the reader that Jīva has divided *bhakti yoga* into *vaidhī*, rule regulated—the nine processes in this preceding section—and *rāgānugā*, spontaneous, which will occupy us later. There is, of course, much more that can be said about *vaidhī bhakti*. Just as there were variant taxonomies of *yoga* practices in addition to the eight limbs

promoted in the *Yoga Sūtras* (there are references in other texts to five limbs as well as six limbs of *yoga* even as the eight limbs became the “classical” model in later times),⁷⁷ so there were various taxonomies of *bhakti* practices in addition to the nine formally presented in texts such as the *Bhāgavata*, which were to become standardized and normalized. Jīva acknowledges that he has not covered everything connected with *vaidhī*, and, in fact, his uncle Rūpa lists sixty-four *bhakti* practices in his *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*. Indeed, Rūpa deemed even this much more expansive list incomplete, referring his readership to the *Hari-Bhakti-Vilāsa*⁷⁸ for even more extensive coverage of other ingredients of *bhakti*.

Worthy of mention from these sixty-four (in addition to the first three pertaining to the *guru*, which will be discussed later) are the last five, since Rūpa specifies them as all-important (some, but not all, of which correspond to the practices in the classical list of nine): Love for service to the lotus feet of the Deity;... relishing the meanings of the *Bhāgavata*; ... association with *bhaktas* who have the same inclination as oneself;... singing the holy names;... and residing in the environment of [Kṛṣṇa’s birthplace] Mathura ... these five are so difficult to comprehend and possess incredible power, that faith in them is hard to find; but even a little connection with them produces love, *bhāva*, in the pure mind. (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant II.225–38) Indeed, only passing comments have been made by Jīva about residing in a holy place, for example, or about pilgrimage. In this regard, in his *Upadeśāmṛta*, Rūpa states: “Here is the essence of all instruction (*upadeśa*): one should pass all one’s time in this manner: residing in Vraj following those who are devoted to Hari,⁷⁹ while increasingly engaging one’s mind and tongue in remembering and reciting the name, forms, and activities of Kṛṣṇa” (8). Both the *Gosvāmīs* and Caitanya spent the rest of their days in holy places, the former in Vṛndāvana, the latter in Jagannāth Pūri.

This might be the place to quote Rūpa’s list of the primary qualities favorable to devotion: “*Bhakti* is made successful by these six things: enthusiasm, confidence, patience, engaging in various activities,

rejection of mundane association, and following the saints” (3). Additionally, while *vaidhī*, of course, nurtures *bhakti*, it seems relevant to note Rūpa’s identification in the *Upadeśāmṛta* of six activities that endanger it: “*Bhakti* is destroyed by these six things: excessive eating, over-endeavoring, idle chatter, not following *niyama* regulations,⁸⁰ association with worldly people, and avariciousness” (2).

By way of a conclusion to all this, the main point is that although among these practices more importance is given to one over others in one place, while a different practice is emphasized somewhere else, there is no contradiction, as these reflect different dispositions and jurisdictions. They are to be understood in the same way as the prescription of medicine [different remedies being pertinent to different ailments]. (*anu* 310) Indeed, any one single practice, performed with pure devotion and unmixed intention, can bestow the goal of *bhakti*: Kṛṣṇa *prema*, love of God. The purpose of all or any one of these practices is this and nothing else.

Bhakti Mixed with Attachment to Dharma and Jñāna

As a contrast to the higher stages of *bhakti* discussed next in *rāgānugā*, and to better highlight it, Jīva spends some time offering observations about Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* that are mixed with motivations other than just pure devotion. He makes a distinction between devotionality free of any self-interest that is performed without any ulterior motive other than to attain pure devotion (*akaitavā bhakti*)—in other words solely to please Kṛṣṇa—and *bhakti* that is performed in order to gain some other type of personal benefit (*sakaitavā bhakti*, *anu* 217).⁸¹ Needless to say: “Hari is pleased by pure *bhakti*. Anything else is just show” (VII.7.52). The *Bhāgavata* sees even *karma yoga* and *jñāna yoga* practices as compromised—while not denying their ability to bestow the respective fruits claimed by them, the realization of the *ātman*—since they are motivated by personal desire, albeit in the form of liberation.⁸² Nonetheless, since almost all *bhakti* in any theistic tradition of the world is performed with some sort of personal self-interest at heart, it is

important to understand the mind-set associated with *sakaitavā bhakti*, motivated devotion, so as to better contrast it with pure devotion, the *rāgānugā bhakti* of the next section, which is the ultimate goal of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*.

With a view to getting a better sense of the relationship between action in the world and the specific types of desires or self-interests underpinning the performance of motivated *bhakti*, we will first discuss the relationship between *bhakti* and *dharma*, then that between *bhakti* and *karma*. We remind the reader of our commitment, outlined in the “Introduction to the Volume,” that our interest in this work is with the theology of *bhakti* and thus with *dharma* as related to the transcendental goal of that theology (Kṛṣṇa *prema*). Therefore, the attitude of the *Bhāgavata* to nondevotional *dharma* in the material world, a very important topic in its own right, lies beyond the scope of our focus. In this, we follow the *Gosvāmīs*, who show very little interest in their voluminous writings to issues pertaining to mundane *dharma*. So we will simply mention in passing that where it does touch on such things (for instance, in the eleventh canto), the *Bhāgavata* is an orthodox, socially conservative text upholding the conventions of the *varṇāśrama* (caste and stage-of-life) social order and gender dynamics in accordance with the standard *dharma śāstras* of its time (such as those of Manu).⁸³

Bhakti and Dharma

The term *dharma* in social contexts refers to duty—the everyday obligations incumbent on any form of familial and civic life.⁸⁴ There are, surely, duties inherited simply by dint of living in this world: in fact, people have multiple *dharmas*—professional, family related, gendered, cultural, stage of life, and so forth—so the term is context-specific. In the idealized Vedic social system, there are four *varṇas*, professional occupations: *brāhmaṇa*, priestly/intellectual and religious specialist; *kṣatriya*, warrior/administrator; *vaiśya*, merchant/landowner; and *sūdra*, employee of the other *varṇas*. There are also four *aśramas*, progressive stages of life: *brahmacārya*, celibate student; *grhaṣṭha*, householder;

vanaprastha, married renunciant retiree; and *saṁnyāsa*, solitary renunciant. In terms of profession, ideally—as is explicit in the *Bhāgavata* and (arguably) implicit in the *Gītā*—occupational *dharma* reflects not the accident of birth, but the natural disposition of a person’s psychophysical nature that lends itself most effectively to a particular type of activity—teaching, statesmanship, business, craftsmanship, and so forth.⁸⁵ Since any expression of *dharma* reflects nothing other than this temporal *guṇa/karma* configuration of a particular body/mind mechanism in any one embodiment, a person’s *dharma* completely changes from one birth to another.⁸⁶ *Dharmas* are thus temporal, as they pertain only to one particular birth; they are not ultimate or connected to the *ātman* per se.

In accordance with the *Gītā* (II.41–46), the *Bhāgavata* opposes the mind-set typically underpinning conventional *dharma* (although not necessarily the performance of the *dharma* itself)—namely, it criticizes the performance of *dharma* to fulfill selfish and personal desires, such as those aimed at satisfying the body and mind. In fact, conventional *dharma* undertaken in the pursuit of material happiness is not the goal of human life for *yoga* in general, as it has nothing to do with the *ātman*, unless performed as *karma yoga* as in the *Gītā*,⁸⁷ where it entails the selfless performance of *dharma*, with no attachment to the results of the actions, or, in *bhakti yoga*, as an offering to *Īśvara*.⁸⁸ Indeed, like the *Gītā*, while the *Bhāgavata* certainly promotes the performance of mundane *dharma* in conventional contexts,⁸⁹ it is clear that this should be coupled with the pursuit of Truth for it to be meaningful from an ultimate point of view. In fact, a good number (but by no means all) of its exemplars represented in this volume completely renounce *dharma* at some point or, at least, again in accordance with the *Gītā*,⁹⁰ are prepared to renounce it for their beloved Lord. This is exemplified most dramatically in the story of the simple cowherding *gopī* women, as we will see, who are heralded as the greatest *yogīs* of all.

Irrespective of whether one remains active in the world or chooses to renounce it, the ultimate *dharma* in the *Bhāgavata* is *bhakti* for *Īśvara*,

which is eternal (that is, continues in the liberated state); everything else is no better than toil and tribulation: The highest *dharma* is that through which *bhakti* for Kṛṣṇa [is born]. It is through this—performed without motive and uninterrupted—that the mind becomes completely satisfied. ... If *dharma*, howsoever perfectly performed, does not produce attraction for the stories of Kṛṣṇa, then it is simply brute labor. (I.2.6–8) Here and elsewhere, the *Bhāgavata* completely reconfigures the meaning of the term *dharma*: “Whatever activity is dedicated to Me, the Supreme, without self-interest, even if it be useless and performed out of fear or other such things, is *dharma*” (XI.21.29); and again: “It is this alone which has been handed down as the ultimate *dharma* for humankind in this world: *bhakti yoga* for *Bhagavān* by taking His name and other such devotional activities” (VI.3.22). The ultimate *dharma*, then, is to connect with *Īśvara* in devotion.

We need to touch briefly on Vedic ritualism. The regularized performance of sacrifice, *yajña*, was also considered a *dharma* in ancient Vedic orthopraxy, as it was considered essential for upholding the natural order of things. Vedic *yajña* was the mainstream form of religion on the sociocultural landscape at the time of the *Bhāgavata* (as also the *Gītā*), and, as we will suggest, it provided the same function as most forms of religiosity today. Vedic *yajña* was also a kind of *bhakti* to celestial beings, *devas*. But it was, in essence, ritualized business—rites performed with extraordinary meticulousness and attention to protocol, but always in the expectation of soliciting boons.⁹¹ Items were offered into the sacred fire, *yajña*, to be transported to the *devas*, the demigods, whom we have been referring to as celestials (so as not to confuse them with the manifestations of *Īśvara*),⁹² in return for material well-being—typically, for the Vedic Āryans, cows, offspring, and victory in battle. It is this mercantile mentality associated with the ritualized Vedic devotionism of the day that is targeted by the *Bhāgavata*, as by the entire Yoga tradition in general,⁹³ as an inferior form of religiosity.

To understand the *Bhāgavata*’s critique of the lusty mind-set

underpinning this ritualistic *dharma* from the perspective of our modern religious attitudes, we can equate Vedic ritualism with materialistic religiosity in general in terms of the desires and expectations that motivate it. By materialistic religiosity, I intend the performance of any religious activity that, rather than seeking ultimate transcendent Truth (whether knowledge of the self or devotion to God), is performed for obtaining temporary benefits for the material body and mind by soliciting higher powers. Thus whether these rituals involve lighting candles, offering prayers, ringing bells, performing prostrations or circumambulations, and other such forms of worship—or, in the Vedic case, offering oblations into the sacred fire—and whether that higher power is conceived of in the form of the celestial recipients of Vedic ritualism (*devas*), or in some notion of God, or angels, saints, *Boddhisattvas*, spirits, or any superhuman entity, the mind-set motivating those activities is essentially the same: the soliciting of some boon. Keeping this in mind, the following quote has perennial relevance: The goal of the *dharma* which leads to liberation is not compatible with [that *dharma* performed for] the goal of material gain:⁹⁴ the goal of the *dharma* which is devoted to the One Supreme Being is not taught in the sacred texts as the desire for material attainment. In fact, the purpose of desire is not to fulfill the gratification of the senses, but to fulfill as much as is necessary to sustain life. And the purpose of life in this world is inquiry into Truth, not to engage in actions dedicated to *karma*, material gain.... Thus,... the ultimate perfection of *dharma*, performed diligently by people according to the divisions of the *varṇas* and *āśramas* (professions and life stages), is the satisfaction of Hari [Kṛṣṇa]. Therefore, *Bhagavān*, the Lord of the *Sātvatas* [Kṛṣṇa], should constantly be heard about, glorified, meditated upon, and worshipped with a concentrated mind. (I.2.9–14) Thus, as is typical of the *bhakti* traditions in general, while the *Bhāgavata* certainly does not undermine *dharma* related to the *varṇāśrama* caste system in terms of its social stratifications and work-related expectations in the real world of *prakṛti*,⁹⁵ it subverts it in the context of *bhakti*. Indeed: “A dog-eater

whose life resources, endeavors, words, and thoughts are devoted to *Bhagavān* is better than a *brāhmaṇa* endowed with the twelve characteristics of the *brāhmaṇa* caste,⁹⁶ who is averse to the lotus feet of Hari.... The former purifies his lineage; not so one who thinks himself to be important” (VII.9.10⁹⁷). In the tenth book, the *brāhmaṇas* themselves lament their caste-induced spiritual myopia: “Curses on that birth which is threefold,⁹⁸ curses on vows, curses on extensive learning, curses on our family lineage, and curses on skill in rituals, because we still remain averse to Kṛṣṇa” (X.23.40). And as a very important aside, of relevance to the modern Indian context, it merits repeating that the *Bhāgavata* explicitly states that caste (as in profession) should be determined by one’s innate nature, not by birthright (VII.2.31, 35).⁹⁹

Gender hierarchies, too, are subverted (but, importantly, only in the context of *bhakti*),¹⁰⁰ with the illiterate, forest-dwelling, simple-hearted *gopī* cowherd women extolled as the greatest of all *yogīs*, simply by dint of their devotion: These *gopī* women are the highest embodied beings on the earth: their love for Govinda [Kṛṣṇa], the soul of everything, is perfected. Those who are fearful of the material world aspire to this, and so do the sages, and so do we ourselves.... *Aho!* May I become any of the shrubs, creepers, or plants in Vṛndāvana that enjoy the dust of the feet of these women. They have renounced their own relatives, who are so hard to give up, as well as the *Ārya* code of conduct, and worshipped the feet of Mukunda [Kṛṣṇa], the sought-for goal of the sacred texts of revelation. ... I pay eternal homage to the dust from the feet of the women of Nanda’s Vraj. (X.47.58–63) And further, in marked contrast to the pure/impure concerns so central to Vedic orthopraxy, even foreigners and those entirely outside the Vedic construct of *dharma* are eligible to practice *bhakti*: “By taking shelter of those devoted to Him, the tribes of the *kirātas*, *hūṇas*, *andhras*, *pulindas*, *pukkaśas*, *ābhīras*, *kaṅkas*, *yavanas*, *khasas*, etc.,¹⁰¹ as well as others who are sinful, become purified” (II.4.18), as do even animals (II.7.46).¹⁰² Indeed, one of the very earliest archaeological evidences for Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* is a metal column, constructed

circa 100 B.C.E. by a Greek, Heliodorus, who refers to himself as a *bhāgavata*. (Western devotees of Kṛṣṇa may thus have a long antiquated predecessor!) *Bhakti*, then, is the ultimate *dharma* and hence the summum bonum and very goal of life, as the five-year-old Prahlaḍa convinces his fellow students: A wise person should practice the *dharma* of *Bhagavān* from childhood. A human birth is rare, and even though it is temporary, it can bestow the goal of life. Therefore, a person in this world should approach the feet of Viṣṇu: He is one's *Īśvara*, the dearest friend, and beloved of all beings. (VII.6.1–2) The *Bhāgavata* urges us to appreciate this rarity and hence urgency of the human opportunity and its potential: it is only in the human form, attained after countless previous births, that one can attain liberation. This is not possible in the higher or lower realms, says Jīva, “because there is complete immersion in sense enjoyment among those born as celestials¹⁰³ and an absence of discrimination (*viveka*) among animals” (*anu* 55). And what is to be lost from at least trying? “If a neophyte, after renouncing conventional *dharma* falls down [from the standards] while worshipping the lotus feet of Hari, what harm is there in that for him? On the other hand, what [ultimate] benefit is attained for one following one's conventional *dharma* but without worship?” (I.5.17). As Kṛṣṇa assures the hesitant Arjuna in the *Gītā* with regard to *yoga* in general, the fallen *yogī* takes a celestial birth in the next life, then returns to this realm and picks up the practices where he or she left off, “as if spontaneously” (VI.37–47). This simply means that the previous birth's *saṁskāras*, latent memories, subconsciously reactivate in the mind, and one is automatically reattracted to the path, seemingly without (or despite) conscious deliberation.

Bhakti Mixed with Karma and Jñāna

Continuing the theme of *bhakti* performed out of some personal motivation, let us further fine-tune our understanding of conventional action in the world, but here with a focus on *karma*, action performed for the fulfillment of desire (where the focus of *dharma* is more on the

moral and dutiful dimension of action). *Karma* is a theme to which Jīva frequently returns in his *Bhakti Sandarbha*, as, naturally, how to act in the world is of paramount concern to most, given that the vast majority of people do have desires that they pursue and are not inclined to renounce the world to become ascetics. This discussion overlaps considerably with the previous one on *dharma* and, indeed, the terms *karma* and *dharma* are sometimes used synonymously. But they have been separated since, whereas the focus in the previous section was on *dharma* as action—the nature of the acts themselves—we now consider action in the world from the perspective of its motive: the desire for outcome.

The definition of *karma* presented by Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* is “the creative force which gives rise to the desires of living beings” (III.8). It is action in pursuit of fulfilling desires. When the pursuit of these desires is undertaken by means of actions performed in accordance with the Vedic legal codes and injunctions, it is *dharma* and begets good fruits (VI.1.40). In classical times, the specifics of what kinds of actions constituted right *dharma* were outlined in a genre of texts, the *Dharma sūtras* or *Dharma śāstras* such as those of Manu.¹⁰⁴ Thus action, *karma*, is to all intents and purposes more or less synonymous with *dharma* (social, professional, or familial duties), when these activities dedicated to the fulfillment of desires are performed within the contours of Vedic norms and regulations.

When desires are pursued disregarding these codes, *karma* becomes *adharma*, non-*dharma* (unrighteousness), and begets bad fruit. In both cases, *karma* is action prompted by desire and, as the *Yoga Sūtras* inform us, determines the *jāti*, future birth; *āyur*, future life span; and *bhoga*, future quality of life, good or bad, of the agent (II.13–14). These fruits or effects are pleasurable or distressful—good or bad birth, long or compromised life span, and good or bad quality of life and access to resources (and all their intervening shades)—depending on whether their initial causal actions fell into the category of *dharma* or *adharma*.¹⁰⁵ The important point is that it is action prompted by desire that generates

seeds of *karmic* reaction, irrespective of whether *dharmic* or *adharmic*, and it is thus action that perpetuates reincarnation (as one must take future births, good or bad, to receive the fruits of such actions). These basic principles of the mechanisms underpinning reincarnation are shared by all the *mokṣa* schools, including Buddhism and Jainism. But this leaves open the possibility of action performed free from desire, which does not plant seeds of reaction. As readers familiar with the *karma yoga* and *bhakti yoga* teachings of the *Gītā* will recognize, it is the mind-set underpinning the performance of action that is in question here—the yearning for material profit, fame, or other such benefit: in other words, desire—not necessarily the actions themselves. It is action performed with desire that perpetuates *samsāra*. Action performed without desire does not breed reaction.

This seed of reaction, good as well as bad, can also be eradicated when *karma* is offered to Kṛṣṇa: “Whatever action you perform, whatever you eat, whatever sacrifices you perform, whatever you give in charity, whatever austerities you undertake, do that as an offering to Me, O Arjuna. In this way, you will be freed from the bondage of the fruits, whether auspicious or inauspicious” (*Gītā*, IX.27–28). In other words, acts of *karma/dharma* may contain varying degrees of self-interest, but they are accepted as *bhakti* when offered to *Īśvara*, and, importantly, this act of offering them erases the very desires that spawned them, along with their reactions.

So in *bhakti yoga* routine duties need not be abandoned but can become *bhakti* when offered to *Īśvara*: “Whatever one does naturally with one’s body, words, mind, senses, intellect, or heart should all be offered to the supreme Nārāyaṇa” (XI.2.36; another theme strongly emphasized in the *Gītā*, such as in IX.27). In fact, according to one verse, one can not only perform one’s *dharma* in the world, but cultivate economic well-being and even satisfy desires while offering these to *Īśvara* and cultivating the various practices associated with *bhakti*, at least until pure *bhakti* devoid of all personal desire is eventually attained: “A faithful person listening to, reciting and remembering the

narrations about Me, which are auspicious and purify the worlds, and enacting My birth and deeds [for example, in dance, poetry, art, drama, and the like], while pursuing [the conventional goals of life] *dharma*, *artha* (prosperity), and *kāma* (desire) for My sake after taking shelter of Me, attains unwavering *bhakti* for Me, the Eternal” (XI.11.23–24).

The idea here is that by dint of focusing the mind on *Īśvara*, any unwholesome desires underpinning one’s actions are eventually eradicated: “For those who worship Him, even though they do not aspire for it, He bestows His own lotus feet, and these extinguish all desire” (V.19.26). In this way, says Jīva, “even through offering one’s worldly activities one can somehow or other still attain perfection” (*anu* 217). Put differently, *karma* is removed by *karma*: “That which causes disease for living beings, cannot [under normal circumstances] be the remedy for that very disease. But it can cure when used as medicine: the performance of all actions (*karma*), which are the causes of bondage for people, when performed for the Supreme become capable of destroying themselves” (I.5.33–34). In Kṛṣṇa’s words, “The desire of those whose minds are absorbed in Me, does not produce desire” (X.22.26).

In point of fact, as we will see much more prominently in the case of Śiva, Kṛṣṇa, too (although much less stressed), is not averse to fulfilling the desires of His devotees on occasion, albeit with a higher goal in mind: “It is true that, when solicited, the Lord fulfills that which has been requested by men; but He is not really bestowing true benefit by this, as more requests are then again made” (V.19.26). Paraphrasing the *Gītā* (X.11), it is *Īśvara*, situated in the heart, who removes ignorance and desire: “All the desires in the heart of a wise person who continuously worships Me through the *bhakti yoga* I have imparted, are destroyed by Me situated in the heart” (XI.21.29); Patañjali’s *Īśvara-praṇidhāṇa* aspect of *kriyā yoga*, designated as that which removes the impurities, *kleśas*, such as desire, and brings about *samādhi*, can also be read in this light (II.1–2; II.45).¹⁰⁶ Therefore, the bottom line is: “Irrespective of whether one is free of desire, full of all desires, or desirous of liberation (*mokṣa*), if one is intelligent, one should intensely worship the Supreme Person

through the practice of *bhakti yoga*” (II.3.10).

And more, even if one is addicted to unwholesome behavior, *adharma*, one is still not excluded from performing *bhakti*. Jīva advises such people to offer even these unwholesome deeds to *Īśvara* accompanied by the following prayer: “May the Lord who is full of compassion bestow compassion upon seeing my suffering due to my bad inclinations which are the cause of this suffering” (*anu* 217). Thus, no one is denied access to *bhakti*: “If even the performer of the most evil deeds worships Me with undivided devotion, he will quickly become righteous and is to be considered saintly, for his determination is perfect” (*Gītā* IX.30–31).

Nonetheless, Jīva notes, there is obviously a difference between genuinely offering one’s *karma* for *Īśvara*’s satisfaction and offering it incidentally as an afterthought. He notes that there might be three motives in the offering of one’s *karma*: the fulfillment of one’s own material desire, to become free from the bondage of *karma*, or pure devotion to *Īśvara* (*anu* 224). In the first two, says Jīva, the underlying motive is actually an aspiration to be free from suffering, and this is self-interest—any devotion to *Īśvara* is merely “a semblance.” The offerings are still efficacious, as has been noted, insofar as they eventually eradicate self-interest and desire, but only the third type of motive, wherein only the satisfaction of *Īśvara* exists, is pure *bhakti*. An example of *bhakti* performed with personal desires is perhaps Dhruva, who will be encountered in his tale in part 3.¹⁰⁷ The child prince performed astonishing *tapas*, austerity, while fixing his mind on Viṣṇu, but his intention was gaining a kingdom greater than that of his father, who had offended him. Once Viṣṇu appears to him, he realizes the foolishness of this aspiration: “Alas! Like a foolish person who, because of little merit,¹⁰⁸ requests chaffed rice from a sovereign, I, because of illusion, requested for my pride [to be upheld] from the Lord who was offering me His own personal abode.” (IV.9.35) In addition to such “devotion mixed with personal sensual desires” (*sa-kāmā bhakti*), Jīva discusses “devotion mixed with a desire for liberation”¹⁰⁹ (*kaivalya-kāmā bhakti*). This is a theme to which we will return frequently in the next section, as

it expresses an important subtext of the *Bhāgavata*. This type of *bhakti* refers to those who devote themselves to *Īśvara*, but with the intention of gaining *mokṣa*, liberation (also known as *kaivalya*)—that is, realization of the *ātman*, the goal associated with the path of *jñāna*. The liberation-seeking type of *bhakta* uses a *bhakti* method for the purpose of realizing the *ātman* rather than engaging in *bhakti* out of love for *Īśvara*.¹¹⁰ In other words, the *yogī* here is worshipping *Īśvara* so as to be purified and in the hope that experience of the *ātman* will be bestowed by *Īśvara*. This type of practice resonates with the role of meditation on *Īśvara* in Patañjali's system, *Īśvara-praṇidhāna*, which results in *samādhi-siddhi* (II.45)—namely, “the immersion of the seer in its own pure essence” (I.3). The important point is that seeking the *ātman* through *bhakti* methods is not the goal of pure *bhakti*, as *Īśvara* is a higher Truth beyond the *ātman*, as we will discuss from a metaphysical perspective in “The Object of *Bhakti*.” Thus the practitioners of these two types of *bhakti* mixed with *karma* or *jñāna* seek goals other than pure devotion for *Bhagavān*. While neither of these is the pure unmotivated *bhakti* that we will encounter in *rāgānugā*, they are both nonetheless efficacious by dint of being connected with *Īśvara* on some level.

Finally, all of these compromised or “mixed” forms of practicing *bhakti* can also be conceptualized according to the *guṇa* schema—that is, different expressions of *bhakti* are also reflective of the different *guṇas* prominent in the mind of the *bhakta*: *Śrī Bhagavān* said: “One who performs *bhakti* for Me full of anger, for the purpose of inflicting violence, out of pride or envy, with a divisive mentality, is in *tamas*. One who worships My Deity form for the purpose of sense indulgence, fame, or power, with a mentality that sees difference, is in *rajas*. One who [worships Me] for the purpose of becoming free from *karma*, as an offering to the Supreme, or because worship is something that ought to be done, yet still entertaining a mentality that sees difference [from Me], is in *sattva*.” (XI.29.7–10) In sum, concluding all this using more familiar modern frames of references, praying to God in any place through any mode of worship for anything other than pure devotion—for one's daily

sustenance, for help in a crisis, for victory in war or sport, for the cure of a loved one—soliciting God for any material, emotional, social, cultural, political, humanitarian, or even soteriological reason, is considered *bhakti* performed under the influence of the *guṇas*. Obviously, appealing to God for humanitarian concerns toward the suffering of others is much higher (*sattva*) in the scheme of “mixed” *bhakti* than praying to God for one’s own successes (*rajas*) or to assist one in harming an enemy (*tamas*). But pure *bhakti* has full faith in and surrender to *Īśvara*’s supreme will and omniscience in all things and thus does not presume to request for some petty tinkering of material affairs for temporary *prakṛtic* gain. Indeed, as we noted, true *bhaktas* do not even request liberation, the goal of all other Indic soteriological (*mokṣa*) systems—even liberation of the personal sort, which maintains a postmortem devotional relationship with *Bhagavān* in *Vaikuṇṭha* or *Goloka*, and thus is deemed acceptable to *Vaiṣṇavas*, unless service to their beloved Lord is its central feature: The characteristic of *bhakti yoga*, which is free of the *guṇas*, has been described as when the mind flows toward Me, who am seated in the heart, unimpeded, simply from hearing about My qualities, like the waters of the *Gaṅgā* river into the ocean. It is that *bhakti* to the Supreme Person, which is free of motive, and uninterrupted. Such persons do not accept [the five types of liberation]—residing in the same abode as *Viṣṇu* (*sālokya*); having the same opulence as Him (*sārṣṭi*); being close to Him (*sāmīpya*); having the same form as Him (*sārūpya*); and merging into Him (*ekatvam*)—even if they are offered—without service to Me. That type of *bhakti yoga* has been described as uninterrupted. By following it, one transcends the three *guṇas* and attains to My nature. (III.29.11–14) By way of a rather succinct yet apropos conclusion to all this, and as a segue into the next section, there are as many varieties of *bhakti* as there are *bhaktas* who practice it: “The path of *bhakti yoga* assumes many forms, my dear lady. It manifests variously, according to the permutations of the *guṇas* manifest in people’s nature” (XI.29.7).

Rāgānugā Bhakti

Vaidhī is clearly the *bhakti* performed by the vast majority of practitioners, but exceptionally advanced practitioners—which generally entails those who have cultivated *vaidhī bhakti* for numerous preceding lifetimes¹¹¹—may immediately experience an irrepressible attraction, *rāga*, toward Kṛṣṇa upon first encountering narratives about Him. This is an attraction that appears spontaneous—*rāga-anugā*, “conforming to one’s [devotional] innate desire.” Before proceeding, we must note that, where the previous discussion on *vaidhī bhakti* contains the basic types of practices recognized and adopted by most schools or expressions of Hindu *bhakti*, even as each tradition tinkers with such practices uniquely and has its own flavorings and details, the following discussion on *rāgānugā* is specific to the Kṛṣṇa theologies of the sixteenth century that emerged with Caitanya and his contemporary Vallabha (in whose tradition these practices are called the *puṣṭi mārṅa*).¹¹² Therefore, for reasons that will become clear, in order to understand *rāgānugā bhakti*, we need to establish some theological infrastructure pertaining to the nature of *mokṣa*, liberation, distinctive of Vaiṣṇava/*Bhāgavata* theology in general. This involves Viṣṇu’s divine realm, *Vaikuṇṭha*, as well as, more particularly still, Kṛṣṇa’s realm, *Goloka*.

The Divine *Brahman* Realms of *Vaikuṇṭha* and *Goloka*

As we will discuss from a philosophical and theological perspective in the chapter “The Object of *Bhakti*,” *Īśvara* is an eternal Supreme Person in the Vaiṣṇava traditions, the *ātmans* are also not only eternal but eternally individual parts of *Īśvara*, and *bhakti* too between these individuals is eternal and not simply a means to some higher end. Where, then, does *bhakti* transpire between *Īśvara* and His *bhaktas* who have attained *mokṣa*, in the postmortem state? And in what manner does this take place, given that liberation entails becoming free from the *prakṛtic* body and mind? The answers to these questions are an essential trademark feature of Vaiṣṇavism, defining and distinguishing its ultimate goals vis-à-vis other *yoga* systems. They are also indispensable to understanding *rāgānugā bhakti*.

In *Bhāgavata* cosmology, or rather beyond it, in the trans-*prakṛtic* dimension of pure *Brahman*, there are innumerable divine realms called *Vaikuṇṭha*. These realms have nothing to do with the temporary realms in *prakṛti* and so are not to be confounded with the celestial realms within *saṁsāra* (*svārga*), the abodes of the *devas*—celestial beings or demigods—which are the destination of those with requisite amounts of good *karma* (which, sooner or later, expires). They are eternal transcendent realms made not of the three *guṇas* of *prakṛti*, discussed later, but of *Brahman* stuff—namely, pure consciousness (*cit-śakti*). They are real, not *māyā*. These constitute the eternal “Kingdom of God” in Vaiṣṇavism, the abodes of Viṣṇu and His devotees.

The *Bhāgavata* provides a few glimpses at the nature of *Vaikuṇṭha*. It is adorable to all the worlds (X.12.26); the highest realm where Viṣṇu, also known as Nārāyaṇa, resides (XII.24.14); the highest region (IV.12.26); beyond the world of darkness and *saṁsāra* (the cycle of birth and death; IV.24.29, X.88.25); the destination of those who have transcended the three *guṇas* (XI.25.22); and beyond which there is no higher place (II.2.18, 11.9.9). The peaceful ascetics who reach that place never return (IV.9.29, X.88.25–26). The residents of *Vaikuṇṭha* have “pure” forms, not material bodies (VII.1.34). These forms are like that of Viṣṇu (III.5.14ff.).¹¹³ One passage notes that Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa resides in *Vaikuṇṭha* with Śrī, the Goddess of Fortune, in palaces with crystal walls. The parks there shine like final liberation itself, and contain wish-fulfilling trees [that can fulfill any request made], which blossom all the year round. There are fragrant winds, and creepers dripping with honey near bodies of water. Cries of exotic birds mingle with the humming of bees, and magnificent flowers bloom everywhere. Devotees of Viṣṇu along with their beautiful wives travel in aerial vehicles made of jewels, emeralds, and gold, but the beautiful smiling residents of this realm cannot distract the minds of the opposite sex, since everyone is absorbed in Kṛṣṇa (III.15.14–25).

Again, all forms in *Vaikuṇṭha* are made of *Brahman* (*cit-śakti*), not of the

ever-changing stuff of *prakṛti*. And the Gauḍīya tradition holds that Śiva has his own transcendent realm as well, where he resides with those who prefer to worship *Īśvara* in that form.¹¹⁴

As a theological aside, a typical default response to the notion of a personal Godhead with a divine abode possessing form and quality is that any such imagining is an anthropomorphic construction—the projection of qualities known to humans upon a transcendent Godhead beyond all such qualities and mental constructions. But from a Vaiṣṇava perspective, rather than Vaikuṇṭha being an anthropomorphic projection, the reverse holds true: it is actually this world that is a “theopomorphic” projection. That is to say, there can be forms and personages in our world only because they are temporary and *prakṛtic* reflections and imitations of the eternal *Brahman* protoforms. This world, as an effect, must owe its dynamic personalized qualities and characteristics to its cause; so this cause, too, must have qualities.¹¹⁵ “Man is made in the image of God” is a coherent inference in personalist theology.¹¹⁶

In any event, according to the Kṛṣṇa branches of Vaiṣṇavism,¹¹⁷ among the Vaikuṇṭha realms of Viṣṇu there is one specific to Kṛṣṇa called Goloka, the most supreme realm of all (the exact relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu is discussed in the chapter “The Object of *Bhakti*”). This transcendent abode of Kṛṣṇa is not described in detail in the tenth book, even though Kṛṣṇa reveals it to the *gopas* (X.28.14), but we are told that it is beyond darkness and is pure, eternal, unlimited, conscious, and effulgent *Brahman* and that the *gopas*, cowherds-men, were overwhelmed with the highest ecstasy upon seeing it (X.28.14–17).¹¹⁸ In fact, for the Gauḍīya tradition, the description of Kṛṣṇa’s own transcendent *Brahman* realm of Goloka corresponds to the descriptions of the landscape of Vraj in the *Bhāgavata*’s tenth book that we will encounter in part 3. Goloka is the divine protoversion of this or, more accurately, the Vraj depicted in the tenth book is a *prakṛtic* version of the true *Brahman* realm. In fact, Jīva outlines in the *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* that there are two manifestations of Vraj: the one visible to the senses and

the one perceivable only in deep states of *bhakti* meditation. The *prakṛtic* Vraj is thus a portal to the divine realm with which it coexists—hence Rūpa’s advice to aspiring *bhaktas* to reside there quoted earlier. Thus, despite such descriptive frugality in its source text, according to the Gauḍīya tradition, expanding, as always, on hints in the *Bhāgavata* itself, when He descends within this world, Kṛṣṇa opens a window into the eternal *Brahman* realm of Goloka. The stories in the tenth book that we will encounter in part 3 about Vraj, where Kṛṣṇa spent His childhood, and indeed, the very landscape with its flora and fauna, are actually, to again borrow some phraseology, something akin to the Kingdom of God on Earth. Not only does Kṛṣṇa descend, He brings His divine abode and even certain associates from Goloka with Him. More than this, and fundamental to understanding *rāgānugā bhakti*, the various relationships we will find between Kṛṣṇa and His beloved associates in Vraj replicate some of the relationships the liberated souls can have with Him for all eternity in the eternal realm within *Brahman*, Goloka.

In fact, the text suggests that Kṛṣṇa’s incarnation has, in reality, two motives: one is the “official” motive expressed in the *Mahābhārata* (I.35–60) and the *Gītā* (IV.4ff.), as also the *Bhāgavata* (X.1.15–22)—namely, to protect the righteous and free the earth from the intolerable buildup of demoniac military power. But the one of interest to us in the context of *rāgānugā bhakti* is to attract the souls lost in *saṁsāra* to the possibility of eternal *līlā*, loving relational pastimes, with God in the transcendent eternal Goloka abode of Vraj, as revealed in the tenth book. These various relationships, discussed next, are deemed so attractive that even just hearing about them enchants the listener away from his or her attachments to the self-centered indulgences of this world of *saṁsāra*, which simply perpetuate the cycle of *karma* and thus of repeated birth and death (XI.1.6–7, XII.3.14–15). *Samādhi*, in Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, is nothing other than initially fixing the mind in contemplating these *līlās* until, ultimately, consciousness is eligible to become absorbed in them directly, even while still embodied. Just as *jñāna yoga*, the path of knowledge, involves fixing the mind on the idea or notion of the *ātman*

until consciousness is eligible to become reabsorbed in its own *ātman* nature experientially, *bhaktas* opt to fix their minds on *līlās* until they become eligible to participate in them directly. They are not interested in the static passive state of self-awareness offered by the *jñāna* paths and prescribed by Patañjali in the *Yoga Sūtras* (even as they acknowledge their factual availability), but seek spiritual reembodiment in a form made of pure *Brahman* and an active dynamic state of relationship with God. The mechanics and metaphysics underpinning the differences in both these practices and their respective goals are discussed in “The Object of *Bhakti*” and “Concluding Reflections.”

With all this as a necessary preliminary backdrop that will become clearer as we proceed, in order to understand the workings of *rāgānugā bhakti* we also still need to understand two further concepts more clearly: *līlā*, pastime, and the divine power that facilitates it, *yogamāyā*.

Līlā and Yogamāyā

In the *Bhāgavata*, the term *līlā* refers to pure play or spontaneous joyful pastime with intimate *bhaktas*.¹¹⁹ It is an exchange of love between God and devotee. The noun *līlā* is used frequently in the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata* when God is playing as a child with His friends in the beautiful idyllic forests of Vraj, where He spent His childhood, interacting with His beloved *bhaktas*—the *gopī* and *gopa* cowherding community—free of any sense of mission or purpose, other than to engage in *līlā*. The term is never used in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, where Kṛṣṇa is portrayed as God playing the role of a teacher imparting spiritual knowledge to Arjuna. But in the Vraj section of the tenth book, we are granted a vision of God at play, God reciprocating playful, loving exchanges with His most intimate *bhaktas*.

Indeed, a number of the usages of the noun *līlā* in the tenth book suggest that Kṛṣṇa has assumed a body for the sake of *līlā*¹²⁰ (in contrast with the *jīvas*, the souls in the world, who are helplessly injected into bodies as a result of their *karma*, propelled along by forces beyond their control). Of course, the *Bhāgavata* resonates with the discussion of the

Vedāntins in insisting that God is *aptarāma*, self-satisfied, and requires nothing. So His decision to engage in *līlā*, then, points to a spontaneous expression of His blissful nature, not to some lack.¹²¹ But most of all, it is an expression of His love for His *bhaktas*, for whom He makes himself amenable so that they can love Him through different roles and relationships according to their devotional desires (*rāga*). All this will become clearer as we discuss the specifics of these relationships.

Kṛṣṇa's *līlā* completely enchants the residents of Vraj, who have earned by the purity of their unshakable *bhakti* over numerous lives this privilege of having their unique personal relationship with Him as friend, parent, or lover (X.8.52). *Līlā* is how Kṛṣṇa and His *bhaktas* express their blissful and spontaneous reciprocation of love according to the devotees' *bhāva*, mood (discussed below). Understandably, the great fortune of the residents of Vraj who were able to engage so intimately with Kṛṣṇa in His *līlā* is stressed prominently throughout the text: to be an intimate associate of God is the highest possible perfection of human existence in the *Bhāgavata* (X.47.58). The ecstatic states of love exhibited by Kṛṣṇa's associates in Vraj are not paralleled by other paradigmatic devotees anywhere else in the entire *Bhāgavata*.

A corollary concept essential to understanding *līlā* is *yogamāyā*, the power of "divine illusion." This nominal compound appears, at first glance, to be an oxymoron. We know in Hindu thought in general that the term *yoga* has positive valences denoting that which connects the *yogī* with the innermost *ātman* (and, in the case of *bhakti yoga*, with *Īśvara*, the Supreme *Ātman*). But we also know that the term *māyā* has negative ones, as that which does precisely the opposite by preventing the practitioner from realizing his or her own *ātman* and also from recognizing *Īśvara*, the *Paramātmā*. *Yoga* is the set of practices that redirects the awareness of *ātman* back to its original pure *Brahman* source (*Yoga Sūtras* I.3), where *māyā* does precisely the contrary; it is the power that prevents the *ātman* from realizing both its nature as pure eternal consciousness and the presence of *Īśvara*. *Māyā* diverts consciousness instead into identifying with the instrumentation of the

external bodily and psychic coverings and then outward into the things of this world as objects of desire.¹²² *Māyā* is the illusory power that keeps the *ātman* bewildered by the sense objects of this world and consequently ensnared in *saṁsāra*,¹²³ while *yoga* is the means to free the *ātman* from these. How then can the oxymoron *yogamāyā* be rendered coherent?

As with her *saṁsāric māyā* counterpart, *Yogamāyā* indeed deludes the pure liberated souls participating in the *līlā* with her power of concealment so that they do not perceive Kṛṣṇa as Supreme Godhead. But, like *bhakti yoga*, she does this so that the souls can connect with *Īśvara* intimately by perceiving Him, rather, as their friend, lover, or child (etc.) instead. Otherwise, if souls realized Kṛṣṇa's true nature as Supreme *Īśvara*, they would consequently be incapable of interacting with Him in *līlā* in these intimate modes because they would be overwhelmed by His majesty and supremacy. Hence the term preserves the valence of illusion, but an illusion that manifests only at the highest stage of *bhakti*. Unlike that of her *saṁsāric* alter ego, *Yogamāyā*'s power of illusion is a highly coveted one experienced only by the most qualified *yogīs*. Although even great *ṛṣis* (sages) are anxious to *avoid* the illusory power of the conventional *māyā*, the greatest sage of all, Nārada, by contrast, is very eager to *experience* the power of the divine *yogamāyā* (X.69.19ff.). While the regular *māyā* can *disappear* only by devotion to Kṛṣṇa, the divine *yogamāyā* can *appear* only by devotion to Kṛṣṇa (X.69.38). Just as entrance to the mundane world of *saṁsāra*, an undesirable state of affairs, depends on the pure knowledge of the *jīva* being enveloped by the influence of the *saṁsāric māyā*, entrance into the transcendent world of *līlā*, a desirable state of affairs, depends on the pure knowledge of the *jīva* being enveloped by the influence of the divine *yogamāyā*.

Kṛṣṇa relishes these personal informal associations far more than the conventional formal worship in awe and reverence that results from the awareness of His position as Lord and Creator of everything. Kṛṣṇa doesn't want to be exclusively *Īśvara*—God on high, so to speak—He also

wants to enjoy *līlā* with His friends as an equal or with His parents as a subordinate: “For those who could understand, *Bhagavān* Kṛṣṇa manifested the condition of [submitting] himself to the control of His dependents in this world” (X.11.9). But how could God truly play spontaneously and unceremoniously with anyone in the role of a son or friend, if everyone knew He was really God? It is *Yogamāyā* who ensures, with her illusory but divine devotional spell, that the *ātmans* in Kṛṣṇa’s *līlā* remain unaware of Kṛṣṇa’s real nature.¹²⁴ Indeed, even Kṛṣṇa himself becomes so involved in His *līlā* that He sometimes also seems to prefer to forget His own supremacy.¹²⁵

The *Bhāgavata* vividly illustrates *yogamāyā*’s essential role in the world of *līlā* when, as we will see in part 3, Kṛṣṇa’s foster mother, Yaśodā, looks into her son’s mouth to see if He has eaten dirt but sees the entire universe there instead (X.8.36). Becoming enlightened as to the real nature of both herself and Kṛṣṇa, she finds that her ability to interact with Him as His mother is immediately shattered and, instead, she begins to bow down at His feet, spouting lofty Vedāntic rhetoric and eulogizing Him as the Supreme Being (X.8.40ff.). Kṛṣṇa immediately deludes her with His *yogamāyā*, erasing her memory of the event so that she can again place Him on her lap, nurse Him, and continue with her maternal duties in pure love, thinking of Him as her adorable infant dependent on her care.¹²⁶ This divine illusion, of course, is appropriate for the perfected souls who have attained God in these ways by their past-life *vaidhī bhakti*, but we, the audience (or, nowadays, reader), are constantly reminded of who Kṛṣṇa is: “Do not consider that Kṛṣṇa is His father’s offspring; He is the *Īśvara* or all *ātmans*, the Supreme imperishable Being. But He has concealed His majesty in the form of a human being by His *māyā* power” (XI.5.49).¹²⁷

Being subject to the influence of *yogamāyā*, and hence able to play such intimate roles in God’s *līlā*, then, is the highest and most rare boon of human existence. The *Bhāgavata* repeatedly states that not even the celestials, or most elevated personalities, or even Viṣṇu’s eternal consort, the Goddess of Fortune herself, enjoy the grace bestowed on the

residents of Vraj (X.9.20). Kṛṣṇa's foster mother, Yaśodā, was able to chase Kṛṣṇa in anger, to spank Him whom the greatest *yogīs* of all cannot reach even in their minds (X.9.9). So elevated are the residents of Vraj that Kṛṣṇa Himself becomes subservient to their love, "like a wooden puppet ... controlled by them" (X.11.7). They are able to engage in these unique modes with Kṛṣṇa, whom *yogīs* cannot reach even after many births of austere disciplines (X.12.12). All this is possible by the power of *Yogamāyā*. Without her, there could be no *līlā* and, hence, no intimate, nonmajestic relationship of love with *Īśvara*. And without such relationships, there could be no *rāgānugā bhakti*.

Rāga, Bhāva, and Rasa

Connecting all this with our present purposes of understanding *rāgānugā bhakti*, when Kṛṣṇa's associates absorb themselves in their particular *līlās* with their Lord under the spell of *yogamāyā*, these relationships are expressions of their specific *rāga*, devotional desire, and *bhāva*, loving mood. *Rāga* and *bhāva* are two out of three terms that overlap and are central to understanding the spontaneous *bhakti* to which we will now turn our attention in this section, the other term being *rasa*. With regard to *rāga*, we will also need to differentiate *rāgānugā bhakti* from the protomodels upon which it is based: *rāgātmikā bhakti*.

Rāga, desire, is one of the five *kleśas*, obstacles to Yoga, which must be overcome in almost all Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain *mokṣa* traditions in order to realize the *ātman* (see, for instance, *Yoga Sūtras* II.4–7).¹²⁸ It stems from *avidyā*, ignorance, defined in the *Yoga Sūtras* as considering oneself to be the temporal, impure, suffering-prone body and mind, rather than the eternal pure blissful *ātman* (II.5). *Rāga* is defined as *sukha-anuśayī*, the pursuit of material pleasure (II.7). The *Nyāya Sūtras* identifies its synonym *icchā* as that which prompts actions (III.2.305), and the *Gītā* gives yet another synonym, *kāma*, as contemplation of and attachment to sense objects (*viṣaya* II.62). All these terms denote the motivational trigger that prompts action aimed at fulfilling some material need or want. Jīva defines *rāga* similarly, as the "innate

overwhelming desire to contact a sense object (*viṣaya*) by one who is attracted to that sense object” (*anu* 310), and Rūpa as “being completely and innately absorbed in the object of desire” (II.272). In all such *yogic* contexts, desire is directed toward the satisfaction of the body/mind self due to ignorance of the true self, and hence it generates *karma*, which is the cause of bondage, *saṁsāra*. In other words, desires underpin actions, and all actions, whether good or bad, when performed in ignorance of the true *ātman* self, generate corresponding reactions, and so one has to take rebirth to experience these reactions, good or bad. Desires are insatiable, says the *Mahābhārata*, and “there has never been, nor will there ever be anyone born in this world who has been able to satisfy them” (*Mokṣadharmā* 177.22); hence desires are “fettters” to this world (*Mokṣadharmā* 251.7). Indeed, the *Gītā* considers mundane desire “the all-consuming enemy in this world, impelling one to impious deeds” (III.36–37).

However, when *Īśvara* is established as the object (*viṣaya*) and desires are channeled toward Him, everything changes, even as such desires are likewise also called *rāga*. The obvious difference is that self-centered desires seeking to gratify the body and mind with the sense objects of *prakṛti* end up perpetuating suffering and *saṁsāra*, the cycle of birth and death, instead.¹²⁹ Attraction for Kṛṣṇa, on the other hand, eradicates mundane desires and attachments and ultimately leads to bliss and liberation (*Gītā* IX.34).¹³⁰ As Kṛṣṇa Himself puts it: “The desire of those whose minds are absorbed in Me, does not produce desire, just as grain which is cooked or fried is not generally capable of sprouting” (X.22.26). Even in the stoic *Yoga Sūtras*, dedication to *Īśvara* removes obstacles such as mundane *rāga* (II.1–2) and causes liberation (II.45).

Nonetheless, the underlying psychological principles of *rāga*, whether stemming from ignorance (the *kleśas*) or of the *bhakti* variety, are identical. Let us consider this with more focus: in conventional Yoga psychology, *rāga* is initiated by the senses encountering an object that produces a pleasant experience. This experience becomes recorded as an imprint (*saṁskāra*) on the mind (*citta*), as all experiences do, which can

then emerge at a later time as a pleasant memory. This memory can be caused either from reencountering that same (or a similar) object, which triggers the memory, or just from idle daydreaming, when one sieves through one's reservoir of *saṁskāras*, patching *saṁskāras* together in fantasy and reverie. Desire is nothing other than contemplation on this memory with a wish to re-create the experience of which it is an imprint. As outlined in the *Gītā* (II.62–63), if the memory is entertained long enough, it develops into desire, which in turn morphs into an impulse for action—to reexperience or reacquire that sense object. This is the psychological (or, actually, metaphysical¹³¹) underpinning of desire and its variants, such as greed and lust, in Yoga.

So, for example, let us suppose that one samples chocolate for the first time, and as a result of this experience the tongue registers a pleasant sensation of taste as a *saṁskāra* in the *citta*. Now, when one happens by the chocolate store some other day and the eyes encounter the chocolate display in the window, one's memory of the previous taste of chocolate is activated—in this case, a pleasant recollection.¹³² That previously existing *saṁskāra* becomes classified as *rāga* when it causes one to wish or decide to reattain the experience underpinning it—that is, to obtain some chocolate on another occasion. So the longer one gazes through the window, the stronger is the likelihood of desire—the impulse to reattain that experience or taste—developing and growing. And aversion works in exactly the same way: the senses encounter an object that creates an unpleasant experience, and this is also recorded as memory. On reencountering that object in some future time (or simply in one's anxious imaginings), one strives to avoid or eliminate it. Fear, anxiety, hatred, anger, and other such mental states are variants of *dveṣa*.

Kṛṣṇa too is a sense object,¹³³ whether encountered through the narratives of the *Bhāgavata*, as in our case—that is, by means of the sense of hearing via the ears through *śravaṇa*, the first process of *bhakti* (or, if reading the text, via the eyes)—or whether encountered personally during His incarnation (through the eyes, ears, and all the senses in the case of the residents of Vraj). The *Bhāgavata* holds that

howsoever encountered, Kṛṣṇa leaves an impression on the mind, which, like any other sensual imprint, remains as a memory. Unless the mind is consumed by an inordinate degree of *tamas* or *rajas* (see discussion in “Meditation in Hate and Lust”), this memory can be enchanting and keep resurfacing, prompting the devotee to continually reseek the experience of Kṛṣṇa through some of the processes of *bhakti* we have discussed—*śravaṇa*, *kīrtana*, *smaraṇa*, and so on. This is the psychological mechanics of *bhakti yoga*.

In fact, this dual applicability of the term *rāga* is just a *bhakti* variant of the binary distinctions between the *kliṣṭa-akliṣṭa vṛttis* (detrimental and nondetrimental states of mind) in Patañjali (I.5) or of the mind’s potential to be either the friend or the enemy of the *yogī* in the *Gītā* (VI.6). Any *yoga* practice takes place in the mind. When the mind is used in ignorance of the true self (*Yoga Sūtras* II.4ff.) and dedicated to the pursuit of bodily and mental desire in the realm of *prakṛti*, rather than the quest for the *ātman* or *Īśvara*, it is detrimental, an obstacle, an enemy, because it is ignorance that perpetuates frustration, unfulfillment, *karma*, and hence *saṁsāra*. But when the functions of the same mind—the *vṛttis* of Patañjali, the object of its thought in the *Gītā*, or, in the present context, its *rāgas*—are directed to the goals of *yoga* of any stripe, the mind is transformed into a *yogic* one: “The wise say that this mind is the cause both of lower experience under the influence of the *guṇas*, as well as of higher existence, liberation, the state beyond the influence of the *guṇas*. If the mind is influenced by the *guṇas*, it leads the living beings to calamity. If it transcends the *guṇas*, it leads to liberation” (V.11.7–8). In other words, love of God, wisdom, discrimination, knowledge, enlightenment, and all or any other such *yogic* attainments refer to nothing other than states of the mind when the mind is manifesting its higher potentials—they are not states of *ātman* in the metaphysics of the *Bhāgavata*.

So, likewise, in the context of *bhakti*; when *rāga* is devotional—that is to say, when the mind is manifesting and channeling feelings of desire and love directed toward Kṛṣṇa, the ensuing state of mind is called

rāgānugā (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant II.272).¹³⁴ We can note that this is one major difference between classical *yoga* and *bhakti*: in generic *yoga* one essentially strives to suppress all states of mind completely (*citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ*, *Yoga Sūtras* I.2) and weaken their underlying impulses such as *rāga* (*kleśa-tanū-karaṇa* II.2). In *bhakti*, devotees have no interest in *nirodhaḥ*, suppressing the mind; *bhaktas* endeavor to fully activate the mind's states and impulses such as *rāga* but to channel them exclusively and entirely toward *Īśvara*.

As touched upon above, these feelings toward *Īśvara* take different forms: “I [Kṛṣṇa] am their intimate soul, the son, friend, teacher, well-wisher, and beloved Deity” (III.25.38).¹³⁵ Simply put, when Kṛṣṇa incarnates, He does so in a familial and social context, as we will see later from the tales of the tenth book. He is thus a son or brother to someone, a husband to someone else again, a friend to others, and so on. And *rāga* in the devotional context is a specific *bhakta*'s spontaneous desire to be Kṛṣṇa's servant or, for another, to be His friend or, for someone else again, to be His parent or lover, the intense attraction underpinning that specific relational mood. It is a desire for Kṛṣṇa molded into the specifics of a relationship unique to the *bhakta*.

Where *rāga* is a specific type of desire, *bhāva* is the mind-set that accommodates it—the mood, thoughts, feelings, and associations nurtured by that desire. A *bhāva* is natural, says Jīva, and unique to each individual “as a distinctive *bhāva* that reflects a *bhakta*'s sense of self” in terms of his or her unique personal relationship with Kṛṣṇa (*anu* 310).¹³⁶ These relationships will be discussed in the next section, but one's *bhāva* can be to consider oneself Kṛṣṇa's parent or friend or lover—to experience the convictions and emotions associated with this sense of self vis-à-vis Kṛṣṇa. It is an unbreakable conviction that Kṛṣṇa is one's very own intimate child, friend, and the like.

Bhāva is the first state of *prema*, which is a more intense level of love of God, the ultimate stage of *bhakti* itself: “When this *bhāva* takes on a very intense nature and is characterized by a sense of ‘my-ness’¹³⁷ [a feeling of Kṛṣṇa belonging to oneself], this stage is called *prema* by the

wise” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant IV.1). This sense of “my-ness” reflects the unbreakable bond the *bhakta* has established with Kṛṣṇa. It is free of all the self-centered motives that we have discussed as “mixed” *bhakti* and hence wins over Viṣṇu (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant IV.13). Just as the last three limbs (*aṅgas*) of Patañjali’s *aṣṭāṅga* (eight-limbed) *yoga*—*dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*—are simply deepening degrees on the same spectrum of concentrative focus (III.1–3), so *prema* is a more intense form of *bhāva*. According to Rūpa, “The progression in the manifestation of *prema*, love of God, for those engaging in *bhakti* is: first faith; then the association of saints; then acts of devotion; then the cessation of all obstacles;¹³⁸ then becoming fixed in practice; then *bhāva*;¹³⁹ then detachment; and then finally *prema* manifests” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant IV.15–16).

Additionally, although *bhāva* and *prema* appear in the mind—permeating it as fire permeates a metal bar—they are divine powers that are distinct from the mind (as fire is distinct from the bar) according to Gauḍīya theology. They are, in fact, bestowed by Kṛṣṇa as a gift from His own personal nature of pure bliss to His devoted *bhaktas*.¹⁴⁰ They are bestowed either as a result of devotional practice, *vaidhī bhakti* (*sādhana*), which is how they are most commonly attained, or, more rarely, for those who are fortunate, simply by the grace of the already perfected *bhaktas* or of Kṛṣṇa.¹⁴¹ Already at the state of *bhāva*, the preliminary ecstatic symptoms of love in the form of tears and goose bumps begin to manifest,¹⁴² and by the stage of *prema* a person’s behavior is unpredictable and hard to comprehend;¹⁴³ we have seen in the example of Caitanya the degree of divine madness and the extremeness of the ecstatic bodily symptoms that the highest states of *prema* can wreak on the *bhakta*.

The reader will, at this point, perhaps be gaining some sense of the richness of the Gauḍīya analysis of the various stages and ingredients of love of God, which are excavated in far greater detail in the technical literature of the tradition, but we still do not yet have all the ingredients in hand to understand *rāgānugā bhakti*. We must briefly touch upon *rasa*

—anyone interested in pursuing further advanced study in Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* will soon encounter the term (and it is the central term in the title of Rūpa’s work *Bhakti-rasa-amṛta-sindhu*, *Ocean of the Nectar of the Experience of Bhakti*).¹⁴⁴ Rūpa describes *rasa* as follows: “When love for Kṛṣṇa has become a fixed state of mind, it becomes *bhakti rasa*. By hearing the stories of Kṛṣṇa, it generates a relishable taste in the heart of the *bhaktas*” (II.1.5). *Rasa* is the “taste” or actual experience of love itself. In other words, while all these terms overlap considerably, and are interdependent and coexistent, *rāga* is the specific desire to relate to Kṛṣṇa in a particular way, *bhāva* is the corresponding mind-set that accommodates and nurtures it, and *rasa* is the specific devotional taste or actual ecstatic experience of love in the heart that ensues from these. There are five primary *rasas* ensuing from what the tradition identifies as the five principal personal relationships a *bhakta* can have with God.¹⁴⁵ From these we have already encountered *dāsyā*, servitorship, and *sakhyā*, friendship, as the seventh and eighth of the nine processes of *vaidhī bhakti*. Now we will find them incorporated as the second and third of these five major *rasas*, the modes of interaction the *bhakta* can have with Kṛṣṇa.

The first of the five *rasas* discussed by Rūpa is *śānta*, peaceful. Here, the *bhakta* is attracted to “the form of *Īśvara*” but not to active participation in the *līlās* enjoyed in the other *rasas* discussed next (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant I.6). There is no *yogamāyā* here, *śānta rasa* stems from awareness that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme *Ātman* (*Parama-ātman*), so there is no sense of the “my-ness” found in the more intimate *rasas* that are devoid of any awareness of God’s majesty, and there is no attitude that one is intimately bound to Kṛṣṇa through an active relationship. In other words, one finds one’s complete existential fulfillment beholding the majesty of God, rather than thinking of God as “my son,” “my friend,” and so forth. Rūpa adds that “it is similar to the happiness found in the *ātman* by the *yogīs*, except that the happiness of the *ātman* is incomplete, and the happiness that is connected with *Īśvara* is complete.... Therefore, when the two eyes behold Kṛṣṇa’s form, the

minds of the great enlightened sages abandon the path of the impersonal *Brahman* [synonymous with *ātman*]” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant 1.5–8). So while this is a passive form of devotion, where the *bhakta* is fully content in the bliss of beholding a vision of the personal Godhead, it is nonetheless an experience that far surpasses the bliss of absorption in one’s *ātman*, which is sometimes referred to as an experience of impersonal *Brahman* (as we will discuss in “The Object of *Bhakti*”).

Rūpa makes another interesting comment here pertaining to one category of *yogī* cultivating *bhakti* through this *śānta bhāva*: “There are ascetics who are completely immersed in renunciation with an unshakable desire for liberation, and who perform worship to *Īśvara*, thinking: ‘Liberation is attained without difficulty through *bhakti*’” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant I.15). In other words, for this category of *yogī*, *bhakti* is performed functionally in the motivated manner *Jīva* described as “devotion mixed with the desire for liberation”¹⁴⁶—namely, to attain an experience of *ātman/Brahman* rather than to achieve unmotivated love of *Īśvara* or experience a relationship with Him. In other words, *Īśvara* is approached as a benefactor, but for an alternative goal, realization of one’s *ātman*, not for the real goal of *rāgānugā bhakti*, which, as we know, is *prema*—love for *Īśvara* and nothing else, not even liberation itself. We will discuss this further, but here we can recall the role of *Īśvara* in the *Yoga Sūtras*: *samādhi siddhiḥ*, to bestow *samādhi* (experience of the *ātman*, II.45), and perhaps Rūpa, too, has this in mind. Nonetheless, even such *ātman*-seeking *yogīs* may be in for a surprise, as Kṛṣṇa Himself notes: “When I am obtained by a *yogī* who is in the state of *samādhi* (*ātman* absorption)¹⁴⁷ their bodies tremble [in ecstasy] by My *līlā*” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant I.36). Along the same lines, Rūpa notes that “when the great occasion of Hari’s *līlā* was sung by Nārada on his *viṇā* stringed instrument, trembling occurred in the body of sage Sanaka, even though Sanaka had attained absorption in *Brahman*” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Southern Quadrant V.19). This, according to another such *yogī* he quotes, is because “the intensity

of that bliss that appeared in *samādhi* after all ignorance had been completely destroyed increased a millionfold when Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of the Yādavas, personally appeared to me”¹⁴⁸ (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant 1.37). In comparison with this *Īśvara*-related bliss, “the long time spent in the bliss of the *ātman* seemed useless” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant 1.34). After seeing Kṛṣṇa’s form, “the mind does not relish the inner *ātman* as it did before” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant I.40). In fact, “after discarding the experience of liberation ... [the] mind longs to see the higher aspect of *Brahman* (*para-Brahman*,¹⁴⁹ beyond the *ātman*), which is that adorable Kṛṣṇa, who is as beautiful as a dark rain-cloud” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Southern Quadrant V.20). Ultimately, “for Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, it is this vision of God that is the true goal of the eight-limbed *yoga*” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant 1.39); in comparison with this, the experience of the *ātman* pales into insignificance (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant I.40).

We have dwelled at some length on the *śānta rasa*, as the reader will soon become well aware that one of the main subthemes of the *Bhāgavata* is this diminution of the goal of classical *yoga*, the experience of one’s *ātman* (*mokṣa/mukti/kaivalya/nirvāṇa*¹⁵⁰), namely, consciousness absorbed in its own nature,¹⁵¹ in comparison with the bliss of any type of personal encounter, relationship, with Kṛṣṇa. The remaining four *rasas* express such personal relationships, each one consecutively increasing the level of bliss experienced by the *bhakta* immersed in that *rasa*.

The second *rasa* is *dāsyā*, which we know from its occurrence as the seventh of the nine processes of *bhakti* is experienced by “those who identify themselves as the servants of Kṛṣṇa” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant II.5). What distinguishes this relationship vis-à-vis the three *rasas* that will follow is “knowledge of Kṛṣṇa’s supreme majesty” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant II.16). *Yogamāyā* is less present here. But *dāsyā*, in turn, differs from the previous first *rasa* in that *dāsyā* is an active relationship rather than the passive one of *śānta*. The defining characteristic of *dāsyā bhaktas* is that they consider themselves

to be incredibly favored by Kṛṣṇa but nonetheless to be His inferiors (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Southern Quadrant V.27). Rūpa identifies various categories of servants, from which, again in keeping with this main subtheme, we can mention those who formerly followed the path of *jñāna*, knowledge, seeking the experience of the *ātman*, but “renounced *mokṣa* after hearing about your sweetness from the saints” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant II.22). The servants are encountered in the selections in part 3 from the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata* exhibiting their devotion as Kṛṣṇa’s attendants and personal servants, fully content with the ecstasy they experience from this relationship.

The third *rasa* is *sakhyā*, friendship (again, these sequential positionings of Kṛṣṇa’s *rasas* reflect the increasing intensity of *rasa*, love, experienced by the *bhakta*). Rūpa defines it as “the affection that exists between two people who are more or less equals; its nature is one of trust and an absence of respectful deference” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant III.105). This intimate sense of equality characterizes this *rasa*, contrasting it with the *rasa* of *dāsya*, where inferiority is felt by the *bhaktas* owing to awareness of Kṛṣṇa’s majesty. *Sakhyā* manifests in such things as laughing and joking (Southern Quadrant V.30). So here, as with the following two *rasas*, Kṛṣṇa conceals His majesty (through *yogamāyā*) and in this *rasa* assumes the role of an equal for those who choose to relate to Him in this way. In all of this, God, out of love, reciprocates with and conforms to the specific nature of the *bhaktas*’ love for Him.

As with all the *rasas*, there are various subcategories of friendship—including that of Arjuna from the *Bhagavad Gītā*. From these varieties, the Vraj friends are preeminent: “The friends in Vraj, who always roam about with Kṛṣṇa and are miserable if they do not see Him even for a split second, devote their lives to Him alone. Therefore, they are considered the best among Kṛṣṇa’s friends” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant III.16). Arjuna’s friendship, while certainly intimate, is comparatively more formal and deferential, as can be gauged from the

Gitā and *Mahābhārata*. We will encounter the *sakhya bhakti* of these most intimate of friends in Vraj in part 3.

The fourth *rasa* is *vātsalya*, parental. Since in this *rasa* Kṛṣṇa submits to accepting protection and support from His *bhaktas* who are in the roles of His parents or senior guardians and well-wishers, here, too, His majesty is even more concealed (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant IV.5). Rūpa defines *vātsalya* as “that love, devoid of all awe and reverence, directed to Kṛṣṇa as one who needs sustenance by someone who provides sustenance” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant IV.52). Those who experience this *bhāva*, in addition to Kṛṣṇa’s actual parents and foster parents, are the elderly cowherd-women and -men of Vraj as well as certain sages (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant IV.10–11). As we will see in part 3, under the influence of *yogamāyā*, those in this *rasa* are fully convinced that Kṛṣṇa is dependent on their protection and support for His well-being, and it is this phenomenon of guardianship that characterizes *vātsalya*.

Finally, exhibiting the most intense expression of love, the fifth *rasa*, *madhura*, amorous, is also the most easily misunderstood. Rūpa defines it as “the pleasure exchanged between Kṛṣṇa and the fawn-eyed women” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Southern Quadrant V.36). The two major expressions of *madhura* are romantic love in separation from the beloved and love in union (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant V.24). The tradition considers the love-stricken behaviors and maddened ramblings of the *gopīs* when their beloved disappears from their midst, examples of love in separation (*virāha bhakti*), to be a more heightened state of ecstatic love than when Kṛṣṇa appears and satisfies their amorous desires. The *gopī* chapters from part 3 portray some sense of the flavor of these modalities of *madhura*. And from all those whose love for Kṛṣṇa is expressed through this *rasa*, “the most excellent of Hari’s beloveds is Rādhārāṇī, the daughter of King Vṛṣabhānu” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant V.7).

Although Rūpa acknowledges that the expressions of *madhura* are vast, and in fact dedicates a separate treatise, the *Ujjvalanīlamanī*, to this

rasa, his treatment of it in the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* is curt. This is “because of its intimate nature, because it is difficult to comprehend, and because it is of no interest to those who are renounced [that is, who seek the *ātman*]” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Western Quadrant V.2). In terms of this last comment, Jīva’ elaborates¹⁵² that the *jñānīs* (*ātman*-seeking *yogīs*) who confound this *rasa* with mundane romance are uninterested in it, even though it is connected with *Bhagavān*. The roots of this difference in understanding between the Vaiṣṇavas and certain *ātman*-seeking *jñāna* traditions will become clearer in the chapter “The Object of *Bhakti*,” which examines how *Īśvara* is conceived in the various traditions.

The misunderstanding of *madhura* in fact prevailed into the colonial era, but for different reasons, and it was to a great extent this aspect of the Kṛṣṇa tradition that caused the Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to be severely impugned and jettisoned in favor of the seemingly more righteous Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhagavad Gītā* in both colonial and Hindu apologetic neo-Vedantin moral discourses.¹⁵³ But of course *madhura* is divine love and has nothing to do with mundane eroticism (indeed, Rūpa, Jīva, and all the *Gosvāmīs* were celibate and highly orthodox renunciants).

Given the extensive nature of the subject and the parameters of our focus, we can do no more than briefly note here that almost all Kṛṣṇa worship in India is Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa worship, at least in the north, even as Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa’s eternal consort in Gauḍīya theology, is not explicitly mentioned in the *Bhāgavata*. This worship is an enormously important feature absolutely central to the highest stages of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*. Rather than attempting an inadequate or cursory treatment of this most intimate form of love of God, we follow Jīva and Rūpa’s example in not covering this in a preliminary treatise on *bhakti* and in advising the reader to engage this topic in subsequent reading (for example, see Rūpa’s *Ujjvalanīlamanī*).¹⁵⁴

Jīva next introduces yet another related and overlapping concept indispensable for our purposes: *rāgātmikā*, the last ingredient we must discuss in order to understand *rāgānugā*, since *rāgānugā* is modeled on *rāgātmikā*. When the *bhāvas* and *rasas* discussed previously are exhibited by Kṛṣṇa’s eternal family and associates in the divine Goloka (Kṛṣṇa’s eternal *Brahman* abode beyond *prakṛti*), they are called *rāgātmikā bhakti*. *Rāgātmikā* means that the very nature of the spiritual mind¹⁵⁵ (*ātmika*) expresses a particular *rāga* for Kṛṣṇa; this *rāga* does not need to be cultivated through practice, as we will see is the case with *rāgānugā*; it is inherent. In other words, it is the specific *rāga* for Kṛṣṇa eternally present in His liberated associates living in Goloka. As we know, this *rāga* produces and sustains the corresponding natural *bhāva*, mood, such as friendship or parenthood, reflecting every *rāgātmika bhakta*’s unique, constant, and natural relationship with Kṛṣṇa. It is spontaneous and completely independent of rules and prescriptions (*vaidhī*) and thus, being natural, is not considered a practice (*sādhana*).¹⁵⁶ In Rūpa’s words, “That form of *bhakti* when *rāga* is utterly absorbed naturally in the beloved is called *rāgātmikā*” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant II.272).

Rāgātmikā is also found in those *bhaktas* eligible to take their last birth in *prakṛti* prior to their attaining the eternal *Brahman* Goloka, which they do during Kṛṣṇa’s incarnation as part of His entourage.¹⁵⁷ These *rāgātmikas* then participate in Kṛṣṇa’s *līlā* when He incarnates. We should always keep in mind, when we read the Vṛndāvana (Vraj) section from the tenth book in part 3 of this volume, that the rustic illiterate cowherd folks among whom Kṛṣṇa appears during His incarnation did not just randomly end up being born by chance at the right time and place. They are all *rāgātmika bhaktas*. His simple-hearted mother, Yaśodā, His hardworking father, Nanda, His boisterous youthful *gopa* (male cowherd) companions and enamored *gopīs* (female cowherds)¹⁵⁸ are all highly accomplished *rāgātmikas* from previous lives: “What did Kṛṣṇa’s father, Nanda, do to obtain such great fortune? And what did the greatly fortunate Yaśodā do, that Hari drank from her breast?” (X.8.46). What

Nanda and Yaśodā in fact did in their previous lives in order to obtain the fortune of having Kṛṣṇa as their son, according to the *Bhāgavata*, was to devote themselves to intensely austere practices of *vaidhī bhakti*, including enduring extremes of temperature and subsisting only on leaves and air (X.3.2–8). It is as a result of this that “Nanda is the most fortunate person in the world of men; the sages who purify the worlds visit [his] house, because the Supreme *Brāhman* Himself, disguised by the characteristics of a human being, resides there” (VII.10.48). The cowherd boys who had the opportunity to roam about with Kṛṣṇa had “accumulated an abundance of merit” (X.12.11), and the *Bhāgavata* cannot even describe the penance that must have been performed previously by the queens of Dvārakā who were able to massage the feet of Kṛṣṇa as their spouse (X.90.27).

It is through remarkable previous-life *vaidhī yoga* practices that some *bhaktas* become eligible to take birth during Kṛṣṇa’s incarnation, and the fruit of this previous practice is that their *rāga* at this point manifests spontaneously; “it is perfected” and arises “like the waves of the *Gaṅgā*” (*anu* 310). They too have attained the stage of *rāgātmikā bhakti*. Like the already eternally liberated souls in the *Brahman* realm of Goloka, those who are born in intimate proximity to Kṛṣṇa during His descent into the world also no longer need to perform practice, *sādhana*, and follow the rules of *vaidhī*, because their devotion has already attained the *sādhya*, the perfected goal of *sādhana*. Hence *rāgātmikā*—as well as *rāgānugā*, which conforms to it—does not come under the heading of *vaidhī bhakti*. But how specifically does *rāgānugā bhakti* differ from *rāgātmikā bhakti*?

The Development of *Rāgānugā Bhakti*

We now have all the pieces in place required to understand *rāgānugā bhakti*. *Rāgānugā* begins after a *bhakta*’s mind has been sufficiently purified of the *kleśas* (mental impurities, such as material desire) by the practice of *vaidhī bhakti*. At this point, he or she begins to develop a preliminary attraction for one of these *rāgas* exhibited by the *rāgātmika bhaktas* encountered in the narratives in part 3 from the tenth book of

the *Bhāgavata*. It is the prequel to becoming a *rāgātmika* oneself, but a stage when the *bhakta* has not yet attained the eternally inherent, perfected, and exclusive love of the actual *rāgātmikas* in Goloka. It is an initial spontaneous attraction conforming to a particular *rāga*, but one that has not yet developed into the intense, all-consuming, uncontrollable love of the *rāgātmikas*. Let us quote Jīva directly here before discussing this further, as, unlike the nine processes of *bhakti*, this level of *bhakti* is inferred from, but not explicitly articulated in, the *Bhāgavata* itself: Now *rāgānugā* will be discussed. When an attraction for a specific type of *rāga* as discussed previously has arisen, but not the actual specific *rāga* itself, the mind becomes like a crystal, reflecting the rays of the moon of that *rāga*. By hearing from the sacred texts and teachers, an attraction arises for the behavior of that *rāgātmika* who has that same *rāga*. That attraction seeking that same *rāga* that manifests in the practitioner is *rāgānugā*. (*anu* 310) *Rāga-anuga* literally means “conforming to” or “following” a *rāga*. As the crystal can “conform” or reflect the moon’s rays, and so capture some of its rays, even though not containing the actual moon, so a *bhakta* accomplished in *vaidhī bhakti* begins to reflect the mood of the chosen *rāgātmika* to whom he or she is attracted, even as his or her own *rāga* in that mood is still preliminary and not yet fully developed. In Rūpa’s words, “When devotion models itself on the *rāgātmikā bhakti* that radiates visibly through the residents of Vraj, it is known as *rāgānugā*” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* II.270).

Rāgānugā thus is a preliminary stage where a particular *rāga*, a particular yearning to relate to Kṛṣṇa in a specific *bhāva*, mood—as a child, friend, lover, and so forth—has begun to stir in the heart of the *bhakta* that has been purified by *vaidhī bhakti*. What Jīva intends by “modeling itself on the *rāgātmika*” is that this fascination or stirring draws the *bhakta* to further and more deeply study and increasingly restudy the specific narratives associated with that particular *rāga*—that is, the relevant narratives in the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata* and its derivative literatures that feature the *rāgātmikas* who exhibit that *rāga*.

The aspiring *bhaktas*' thoughts and moods start to conform to those of the favorite *rāgātmikas* in the narrative. These *rāgātmikas* thus become the exemplars that the *rāgānugā bhaktas* seek to emulate.¹⁵⁹

So, for example, if one is intrigued by and drawn to Kṛṣṇa as a young boy in the mood of the *sakhya bhāva* of friendship, one will especially relish those specific narratives where Kṛṣṇa goes to the forest with His companions of the same age, frolicking and playing games, such as those we will find in the *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa with the cowherd boys in part 3. One never gets tired of reading these sections of the narrative but finds oneself becoming more and more enchanted with each reading and wondering about this or that detail. Now, within such narratives, the friends of Kṛṣṇa, who already have the full-blown eternal love for Kṛṣṇa in that *sakhya rāga*, are the *rāgātmikas*. They are *rāgātmikas* because their *rāga* is their very nature (*ātmika*). It is inherent, not something that needs to be further cultivated, as is the case with the *rāgānugās*. So they serve as the role models for the *rāgānugās*, the readers¹⁶⁰ who are beginning to experience a spontaneous attraction to these particular episodes and to feel an inclination to mold their own *bhāva* on these exemplars.

This principle is fairly standard even in conventional behavior: if one wishes to become, say, a popular singer, one will likely spend much time imitating and copying the songs of others who “have made it” in the particular style of music to which one is drawn and seek every detail about the life and behaviors of one's idols that one can possibly glean, before one develops one's own identity in that genre. So with *rāgānugā*: Those are eligible for *rāgānugā* who are eager to attain the *bhāva* of those residents of Vraj who are fixed exclusively in *rāgātmikā*. The sign of the emergence of that desire is that, when hearing the sweetness of that *bhāva*, the intelligence has no regard for the [prescriptions of] sacred texts or logic. However, one [whose devotion has not yet manifested sufficiently and hence who is more appropriately] eligible for *vaidhī bhakti* should follow the prescriptions of the sacred texts and also engage the type of logic that is favorable [to *bhakti*] until the *bhāva* manifests.

(*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant II.291–93) *Vaidhī bhakti* is weak compared with *rāgānugā*, says Jīva, as it is based on the prescriptions of the sacred texts, where *rāgānugā* is independent of rules and irresistible. Scriptural injunctions, says Jīva, are intended only for those who do not have natural attraction for *bhakti*. Prescriptions and regulations are there so as to at least somehow or other initiate some form of practice by training the mind in a way that gradually leads to it becoming absorbed in devotion; otherwise it is overwhelmed by the material disturbances (*kleśas*) endemic in embodied life. But they are not required for one who actually has *bhāva*, because such a person will naturally and spontaneously be absorbed in thoughts of the Beloved, irrespective of theological scriptural pronouncements and prescriptions: “Sages who are situated in the state beyond the *guṇas*, have desisted from rules and regulations and relish the qualities and stories of Hari” (II.1.7). In fact, we know that such spontaneous and irrepressible love transcends consideration or awareness of even who Kṛṣṇa is in the grand scheme of things: “Whether one knows or does not know who I am, or the nature or extent of My Being, if one worships Me with undivided *bhakti*, I consider that person to be the best of all *bhaktas*” (XI.11.33).

However, Jīva preemptively quickly adds that this type of spontaneous devotion is very rare, and if one imagines oneself out of conceit (or, worse, nefarious motives) to have attained this as an excuse for disregarding scriptural injunctions, then one is simply deluding oneself and others out of foolish pride. Indeed, to minimize the possibility of being exploited by charlatans posing as *rāgānugā bhaktas* so as to transgress moral social norms or befool the public, Jīva recommends real *rāgānugā bhaktas* to nonetheless combine their spontaneous unrestrained devotion with *vaidhī* prescriptions and practices so as to set an example for others, even if they themselves have transcended the need for *vaidhī* (*anu* 132).

We are reminded here of a parallel situation in the *Gītā*, but there in the context of following duty and social prescriptions (*dharma*). Kṛṣṇa

tells Arjuna that even though it is true that “for a person who delights in the *ātman*, is satisfied in the *ātman*, and is content in the *ātman*, there is no *dharma*,” by the same token, even as “there is no gain to be had from performing work, there is also no gain to be had from not performing work” (IX.17–18). Therefore, he recommends that Arjuna “should perform work to uphold the social order ... as whatever acts a great person does, people will follow” (IX.20–21). Even He Himself acts, says Kṛṣṇa, despite being the supreme unrestrained Lord, otherwise people would try to imitate His example (IX.22–23). Very relevant here, too, is Patañjali’s (unusually) emphatic assertion that there are absolutely no exceptions to the following of the *yama* moral obligations, predicated on neither birth, time, place, nor circumstance of any sort (such as level of spiritual attainment).¹⁶¹ Thus, any aspiring *yogī* approaching a *guru* figure who claims to have transcended the need for moral codes in the name of some higher esoteric spirituality should know that such claims are not in line with the classical *yoga*, Vedānta, *jñāna*, Vaiṣṇava, Śaivite, or *Bhāgavata* traditions (or, indeed, any Indic tradition, including Buddhism, Jainism, and right-handed Tantra¹⁶²).

To conclude this section, then, the prescriptions of the sacred texts, including those of *vaidhī bhakti*, are designed to train the mind of the aspiring *bhakta* toward an increasing absorption on Kṛṣṇa—specifically, on His names, forms, qualities, and pastimes. When Kṛṣṇa sees the sincerity of the practitioner, He cleanses the mind of all impurities—such as the *kleśas*, ignorance, ego, *rāga* for sensual indulgences, and so on (*Yoga Sūtras* II.3ff.). As the mind becomes pure, it loses its *rāgas* for the sense objects of *prakṛti* and begins to replace these with the beginnings of a particular *rāga* for Kṛṣṇa. This *rāga* can take various forms—an attraction to Kṛṣṇa as a master, child, friend, or lover, the five *bhāvas*, or *rasas*. As this *rāga* deepens, one becomes drawn to the liberated *rāgātmika bhaktas* who spontaneously embody this particular *rāga* with their entire being in their intimate interactions with Kṛṣṇa during His *līlās*. One encounters such *rāgātmikas* within the texts that record and depict them—with the *Bhāgavata*’s tenth book as canonical and

paramount in this regard. Through study and instruction on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, one strives to enter deeper and deeper into the *bhāva*, mood, of this role model *rāgātmika*, spontaneously modeling (“conforming,” *anuga*) one’s own thoughts upon his or hers. This practice is natural rather than prescribed (and therefore, in a sense, if not artificial, somewhat forced), as is the case with *vaidhī*. This is *rāgānugā bhakti*, the goal of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* as a *yoga* process prior to liberation, but the penultimate goal of *bhakti* itself. The ultimate grand-finale stage is to oneself attain a role as a *rāgātmika* in Kṛṣṇa’s divine *Brahman* realm of Goloka (or as a *rāgātmika bhakta* during Kṛṣṇa’s next incarnation in *prakṛti*, and then, after that last birth, continuing that *rāgātmikā bhakti* for all eternity in Goloka). For this, as will be discussed further, one is endowed with a divine *Brahman* body and mind bestowed by Kṛṣṇa upon shedding the *prakṛtic* body (for example, see I.6.28 and IV.12.29) that can facilitate that requisite *bhāva*.

Pertinent to all this, in *Bhāgavata* theology, it is the *bhakta* who chooses the *bhāva* toward *Īśvara* corresponding to his or her desire and preferences. There is free will here.¹⁶³ In the *Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa states that “in whatever way people resort to Me, I reciprocate in that way” (IV.11). As always, the *Bhāgavata* is a bit more expansive and visual in exemplifying this: Kṛṣṇa went to the arena with his elder brother. He was perceived by the wrestlers as a lightning bolt; by men as the best of men; by the women as Kāma (Cupid) personified; by the *gopas* as their relative; by the unrighteous rulers of the earth as the chastiser; by His mother and father as a child; by Kāṁsa, the king of the Bhojas, as death; by the ignorant as the manifest universe; by the *yogīs* as the Supreme Truth; and by the Vṛṣṇi clan as the Supreme Divinity. (X.43.14) While ultimately *bhāva* is bestowed by Kṛṣṇa (Eastern Quadrant III.4), it reflects the free will of the *bhakta*. For those who have attained the stage of *rāgānugā*, Kṛṣṇa is just as keen to reciprocate and serve His *bhaktas* as they are to offer their loving service to Him. Love involves reciprocal submission and service between individuals: it cannot be unidirectional. As we will see in the *līlā* stories in part 3, even though supremely independent, and

even though He is *svarati*, one whose pleasure is self-contained and needs no external stimulus (X.33.23), Kṛṣṇa relishes submitting to His beloved devotees: “The quality of submission to His devotee was demonstrated by Hari, despite the fact that He is only constrained by His own free will” (X.919). “He becomes subservient to His servants such as the Pāṇḍavas, acting as friend, messenger, and guard,” says Jīva (*anu* 327).

Meditation in Hate and Lust

Those familiar with the *Yoga Sūtras* will recall that *rāga*, desire, the third of the five *kleśas*, obstacles to *yoga*, has a flip side: *dveṣa*, aversion, the fourth *kleśa* (II.3–8). Indeed, the mechanisms underpinning these two *kleśas* are identical. In the *Bhakti Sandarbha*, Jīva discusses an interesting counterpart to being spontaneously absorbed in adoring thoughts of Kṛṣṇa’s attractive qualities: one can obsessively despise Him and still attain liberation. The *Bhāgavata* makes a point of stressing that one does not even need to be favorably devoted to Kṛṣṇa, as long as the mind is intent upon Him. In other words, *dveṣa* can be directed toward Kṛṣṇa, just as *rāga* can. Our discussion on this is followed by point of contrast with some further comments on *rāga* directed toward Kṛṣṇa, but in this case *rāga* that stems from sensual lust for personal sexual gratification. And this, in turn, is compared with the *rāgānugā* of the *gopīs* touched upon above.

Meditating in Enmity: Kṛṣṇa and the Demons

The *Bhāgavata* highlights in numerous narratives that even adversaries and demons (*asuras*) out to kill Kṛṣṇa attain liberation, simply by dint of their minds being absorbed in Him, albeit in psychopathic hatred: “Even [the demoness] Pūtānā, in the guise of a good person, attained You, O God” (X.14.35, X.6.35). Since she was a devourer of infants who attempted to murder Kṛṣṇa, “it is astonishing that the wicked Pūtānā attained the destination of Kṛṣṇa’s mothers, even though she offered Kṛṣṇa her breast smeared with poison desiring to kill Him. Who else is more merciful than He?” (III.2.23). We will see in part 3 that when the

serpent demon Agha was killed, “an amazing great light rose up from the thick coils of the snake, illuminating the ten directions with its splendor. It waited in the sky for the Lord to emerge, and then entered into Him before the very eyes of the residents of the celestial realms” (X.12.33). This type of liberation¹⁶⁴ is attained by all the demons such as Śīsupāla (X.74.45) and Dantavakra (X.78.9–10), who “could not tolerate Kṛṣṇa from the time they began babbling as babies!” Kṛṣṇa’s mortal enemy Pauṇḍraka, like the demon king Kāṁsa, had his bondage destroyed “through his unceasing meditation on *Bhagavān*.” He was awarded liberation, because “even Kṛṣṇa’s sworn enemies attain the highest destination” (X.66.24, X.87.23).¹⁶⁵

King Yudhiṣṭhira asks Nārada how all this can possibly be so—how, rather than being cast into hell, can Kṛṣṇa’s murderous enemies attain a destination even the saintly *jñāna yogīs* who seek their *ātman* do not achieve? The sage replies that Kṛṣṇa cannot be touched by anger. Anger, as Patañjali tells us, stems from ignorance of the true self (*Yoga Sūtras* II.12)—that is, from misidentifying with the temporal *prakṛtic* coverings of body and mind. Clearly *Īśvara*, the Supreme *Ātman*, is not subject to ignorance.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, everything *Īśvara* does is for the ultimate welfare of His creation and not out of the *kleśas*—ignorance and its by-products, such as anger and revenge (*dveṣa*). Demons (*asuras*) too are nothing other than *ātman*s temporarily covered by inordinately dense *tamas* and *rajas* due to past misdeeds. But beneath those layers they are also *Īśvara*’s *aṁśas* (parts) and eligible to burn up their afflicted *karma* and attain liberation like any other embodied being. And anyone, friend or foe, coming in contact with Kṛṣṇa becomes purified.

But for our purposes of understanding the mechanics of *bhakti* as a *yoga* process, from a *samādhi* point of view, Kṛṣṇa’s enemies may have been unconventionally devoted—devoted to killing Kṛṣṇa—but this is still a mental absorption so intense that it was nonetheless a type of undeviating concentration on *Īśvara*. Patañjali defines *samādhi* as “when only the object of meditation shines forth alone, and [the mind] is devoid of its own [reflective nature]” (III.3). Put differently, when one is

not aware of anything other than the object of meditation in conventional *samādhi*, then that object constitutes one's universe.¹⁶⁷ Consider, in this light, Kṛṣṇa's archenemy: "Whether sitting, resting, eating, or moving about the land, Kāṁsa thought of Kṛṣṇa. He saw the whole universe pervaded by Kṛṣṇa" (X.1.24). For the *Bhāgavata*, this qualifies as an expression of *samādhi*—after all, in order to attain *samādhi*, Patañjali allows that one can fix the mind on anything, *yathābhimatā-dhyānād vā* (I.39), as long as it is undeviating. In fact, says sage Nārada, these adversaries' fear and hatred may sometimes translate into an even deeper state of *samādhi* than that of the pious *bhaktas*: "Just as an insect, trapped in a pot by a wasp, and thinking of him in anger and fear, attains the same form as the wasp [in the next life]."¹⁶⁸

Of course, Jīva (and Rūpa) hasten to note that despite the liberation awarded to Kṛṣṇa's adversaries, their type of meditation is not considered part of the *Bhāgavata dharma*. Obviously *bhakti yoga* promotes a loving intentionality as that underpinning the mind's absorption in *Īśvara*. And needless to say, if those inimical to Kṛṣṇa are involuntarily liberated just by coming into contact with Him, irrespective of their motives, then "what to speak of those who offer something of highest value to Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Soul, with faith and devotion like His mothers did?!" (X.6.36). Put more elaborately: "[The adversarial] kings, thinking in enmity of Kṛṣṇa's gait, appearance, and eye movements, while sleeping, sitting, and engaging in other acts, had their minds molded by Him, and so attained oneness with Him—what then to speak of¹⁶⁹ those whose minds are full of love for Him?!" (XI.5.48).

The following passage sums up the psychological principles involved here: One should fix one's mind on Govinda [Kṛṣṇa] and not think of anything else, whether out of enmity, friendship, goodwill, fear, affection, or lust.... [His] enemies had their sins cleansed from thinking of Kṛṣṇa, who is *Īśvara*, *Bhagavān*, and has taken the form of a human through his *māyā* potency. Many have attained His abode after becoming freed from sin and absorbing their mind in *Īśvara* out of desire, enmity,

fear, affection, or *bhakti*: the *gopīs* out of desire, Kāṁsa out of fear, the king of the Cedis out of enmity, the Vṛṣṇi clan out of friendship, you [Pāṇḍavas] through friendship, and we [Nārada and others] through *bhakti*.” (VII.1.25–30) Anything coming into contact with *Īśvara* even mentally becomes purified, just as anyone contacting electricity becomes electrified, irrespective of who that person is or what his or her motive might be: “Kṛṣṇa bestows the devotional path [to one who even] once internalizes a mental image of Kṛṣṇa’s body” (X.12.39); “By meditating on, hearing, and reciting Your name, by worshipping and remembering you, even a dog-eater from anywhere is made fit to perform the *soma* ritual pressing;¹⁷⁰ what then to speak of one who has had a direct vision of You, O *Bhagavān*?” (III.33.17). As Kṛṣṇa is supreme purity, nothing in contact with Him can remain impure.

Meditating in Passion: Kṛṣṇa and the *Gopīs*

Jīva then proceeds to engage the very same principles in considering the amorous desire that the *gopīs*, Kṛṣṇa’s adoring cowherd maidens, directed toward their beloved (*anu* 320), which we will encounter in their narrative in part 3. Isn’t their attitude a *rāga*, the flip side of *dveṣa*, enmity/aversion from Patañjali’s five *kleśas*, obstacles to *yoga*? The *gopīs*’ *rāga* is rather different from the *dveṣa* of Kṛṣṇa’s adversaries, as, in Jīva’s opinion, unlike the latter, they had no self-interest in their undeviating absorption on Kṛṣṇa, even as they are attracted to Kṛṣṇa as a gorgeous male. We will return to the *gopīs* in a moment. Perhaps the ointment maker Kujā, who unabashedly solicits Kṛṣṇa when the latter enters the capital city, Mathurā, is a better counterexample of the *dveṣa*, aversion, phenomenon of Kṛṣṇa’s enemies, as her intentions are clearly lusty and geared toward her own sensual impulse: “Kujā pulled the end of Kṛṣṇa’s outer garment and spoke to Him smiling. Kāma (Cupid) had awakened in her heart: ‘Come, hero, I am unable to leave you here—let us go home! You are the best of men; oblige a woman whose mind has been aroused by You!’” (X.42.9–10). Kṛṣṇa obliges because of her simple act of devotion in offering Him her choicest perfumes. Thus, while her

intentions were not selfless as Jīva considers those of the *gopīs* to be, nonetheless, because Kujā's *rāga* was directed toward *Īśvara*, rather than some object of *prakṛti*, she attained the highest goal of life, and in this represents the flip side of the *dveṣa* principles of Kṛṣṇa's adversaries outlined above.

The *rāga* of the *gopīs*, in contrast, is heralded in Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* as the highest, purest expression of simple and unrefined, selfless love. While it was love reflected through an amorous or conjugal *bhāva*, it was centered on abandoning all personal considerations for Kṛṣṇa's satisfaction: "We gently place Your tender lotus feet on our rough breasts with trepidation. You wander in the forest on them and our minds are disturbed: What if they have been hurt by small stones? Your Lordship is our life" (I.31.19). Kṛṣṇa Himself appears stumped by the purity of their love: "You have broken the enduring shackles of the household, and have served Me. You are full of goodness and without fault, and I am unable to reciprocate.... Therefore, let your reward be your own excellence" (X.32.22). Love for anything other than *Īśvara* simply "shackles" one to the institutions of *samsāra* such as the household, where love for Kṛṣṇa liberates one and entitles one to attain the divine realm of Vaikuṇṭha/Goloka. And of all those who love Kṛṣṇa, the illiterate simple-minded *gopīs* are deemed the topmost *bhaktas* in the *Bhāgavata*.

One passage is worth quoting at length in this regard for the insights it expresses with regard to the unsurpassed *bhāva* of these female *rāgātmikās*: When Uddhava saw how moved the *gopīs* were in their preoccupation with Kṛṣṇa, he was extremely pleased. Paying homage to them, he spoke as follows: "These *gopī* women are the highest embodied beings on the earth: their love for Govinda [Kṛṣṇa], the soul of everything, is perfected. Those who are fearful of the material world aspire to this, and so do the sages, as do we ourselves. What is the use of births as Brahmā [the highest celestial being], for one who has a taste for the infinite stories [of Kṛṣṇa]? On the one hand, these women are forest dwellers tainted by deviant behaviors, yet, on the other, they have

developed a love for Kṛṣṇa, the soul of everything. Truly, the Lord personally bestows blessings on the person who worships Him even if that person is not learned.... He bestowed His favor on the beloved women of Vraj, who were accorded the honor of having their necks embraced by his long arms. Such favor was not bestowed on the most loving Śrī, the Goddess of Fortune, who [resides] on His chest, nor on the celestial women, who have the beauty and the scent of lotuses—not to mention other women. *Aho!* May I become any of the shrubs, creepers, or plants in Vṛndāvana that enjoy the dust of the feet of these women. They have renounced their own relatives, which are so hard to give up, as well as the Āryan code of conduct,¹⁷¹ and worshipped the feet of Mukunda [Kṛṣṇa], the sought-for goal of the sacred texts of revelation.” (X.47.58–61) And once again, let us not forget, when we contemplate who it is that takes birth as a female who gets to experience intimate association with Kṛṣṇa, that “how can one describe the penance [they must have performed in previous lives]?” (X.90.27). Jīva quotes the *Kūrma Purāṇa* here: “The sons of Agni [in a previous life], great souls, attained a female form [as *gopīs*] through great austerity (*tapas*), and thereby Kṛṣṇa, the son of Vāsudeva, the unborn, all-pervading source of the universe, as their husband.”¹⁷² In fact, the text presents the *gopīs* as the most accomplished beings in the entire universe.¹⁷³ It is essential to note that the *rāga* one develops toward Kṛṣṇa has nothing to do with one’s temporary gendered embodiment in any particular birth: it transcends the sexual orientations of any temporal body or mind-set, which changes from birth to birth. Males too can be drawn to an amorous physical *rāga* toward Kṛṣṇa. Rūpa quotes a verse in the *Padma Purāṇa* similar to the reference in the *Kūrma Purāṇa* noted above, but here about other sages in the Daṇḍaka forest from a previous age mentioned in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, who became enamored with Rāma, a previous incarnation, and so in a subsequent birth they too took birth in Vṛndāvana as *gopīs*.¹⁷⁴

This brings us to the topic of our next section. How does one become

a *bhakta* of one sort or another to begin with? We have seen some of the various permutations that *bhakti yoga* can take—what are some of the characteristics of the various categories of *bhakta*?

The Practitioner of *Bhakti*, the *Bhakta*

The First Step in *Bhakti*: Association with a *Bhakta*

We now turn our attention to the *bhakta* as the performer of *bhakti*. One of the first questions Jīva raises in this regard in the *Bhakti Sandarbha* is: How does one become a *bhakta*? Put differently, if a *bhakta* is one who performs *bhakti yoga* out of devotion for *Īśvara*, then how is the initial devotional attraction, *rāga*, to *Īśvara* prompting a *yogī* to initially take up the path of *bhakti* developed in the first place? While, as we know, this *rāga* toward *Īśvara* is the cause of liberation and has nothing to do with the mundane attachments to the temporal personages or objects of *prakṛti*, it is still a *rāga*—a *saṁskāra*, or “mental imprint,” of something pleasing to the mind. Thus, although we are dealing with a unique sort of *rāga*, the psychological metaphysics and mechanisms are the same: whether mundane or devotional, *saṁskāras* do not self-manifest; they enter into the *citta* from external sense impressions, and *bhakti* is no different. So from where do the very first external impressions originate to then enter the mind to eventually form *saṁskāras* of *rāga* for *Īśvara*?

Jīva notes that some souls are already born with the *saṁskāras* of *bhakti* that were cultivated in a past life (see *Gītā* VI.37–47 for an exposition on this and the Tale of King Bharata in part 2 for a narrative example). These *saṁskāras* are triggered in the subsequent life when coming in contact with a *bhakti* environment, at which time such persons appear to be endowed with a natural or spontaneous attraction to *bhakti*; but this is, in fact, an attraction born of the reactivation of past-life

saṁskāras. For such rare souls “who are already eager to hear, *Īśvara* is immediately captured” (I.1.2). Such individuals do not necessarily need a *bhakti yoga* path since their devotion appears spontaneous. But even then, the same question remains here, too: From where did the original seed of *bhakti* in some past life first originate?

For most, *bhakti* needs to be cultivated, requiring conscious and determined work owing to the presence of mundane desire and other spiritual defects that occupy and dominate the mind. We can locate the vast majority of *bhaktas* in this category given that even Prahlāda, one of the great *mahājana* (exemplar) devotees of all time,¹ who will be encountered in part 2, laments: “O Viṣṇu, Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, my mind does not take pleasure in narratives about You: it is completely corrupt, impious, agitated, overwhelmed by lust, and tormented by joy, sorrow, fear, and desire. How then, with such a mind, can a wretch like me contemplate your nature?” (VII.9.39). It is for those with minds like this whose attraction is not spontaneous that a process is required; hence the efforts of theologians such as Jīva and Rūpa in composing voluminous literature outlining the path of *bhakti yoga*. But the question still remains: Whether in this or a past life, whether spontaneously or cultivated, how is anyone inspired to take up the process at all in the first instance? Whence the very first *saṁskāra* of attraction?

For the majority of newcomers to the path of *bhakti*, this first impulse is due to the grace of a *bhakta*, also known as a *bhāgavata*, an advanced practitioner of *bhakti*, who plants a deep seed of *bhakti* in the disciple’s mind, which overwhelms it. (The term *bhāgavata* refers both to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as text and to the practitioner of its contents, that is, the devotee of *Bhagavān*; the former is differentiated from the latter herein by a capital letter.) At the beginning of the *Bhāgavata* (I.2.16–22), the sage Sūta outlines (what Jīva identifies as) the basic five-step process through which this beginning seed of *bhakti* is first attained and then cultivated—in other words, the method by which one typically becomes a *bhakta*. This sequence perhaps functions as a sort of minipreview of the role that the *Bhāgavata* itself is attempting to accomplish as its own

raison d'être, which is precisely this planting of the seeds of *bhakti*.

First: “Attraction to the stories of Vāsudeva (Kṛṣṇa) develops for one who is faithful and desires to hear by means of service to the sages and assisting great saints” (I.2.16). The seed of *bhakti* is attained by associating with those who already have that seed. Here, Jīva points to the importance of holy places in Hinduism, as sages and saints—*bhaktas*—congregate in those sacred environments that are reminiscent of their beloved deity and thereby supportive of their meditative practices (as is still the case today), such as Kṛṣṇa’s childhood home, Vṛndāvana. And *bhaktas*, says Jīva, naturally discuss their beloved *Īśvara* among themselves (*anu* 11): In that place where there are *bhāgavata* devotees, O king, who are saints with pure hearts and minds eagerly hearing and reciting the narratives and qualities of *Bhagavān*, there, rivers of the nectar of narrations about Viṣṇu recited by the great souls flow everywhere. Those who imbibe these narrations with inundated ears without getting satiated, O king, are never affected by illusion, sorrow, fear, or hunger. (IV.29.39–40) Holy places thus provide a locus where *bhaktas* can be encountered, and it is by associating with such persons, hearing from them, admiring their character and devotion, and assisting them in their service to *Īśvara* that one’s own very first seed of *bhakti* is born: “From association with saints, realization of My power arises. Then, these narratives of My activities become pleasing to the ears and the heart. By enjoying them, faith, love, and devotion quickly manifest consecutively on the path to liberation” (III.25.25). Thus the association of *bhaktas* is, in essence, nothing other than *śravaṇa*, hearing, the first of the nine processes of *bhakti*: “Among such souls, discussions of the qualities of Viṣṇu are relished and mundane topics avoided. By cultivating these discussions daily, the pure mind of the seeker of liberation becomes inclined toward Vāsudeva [Kṛṣṇa]” (V.12.13). One’s first step to becoming a *bhakta*, then, is through fellowship with other *bhaktas*.

As a result of this association, in the next step, the *kleśas*,

impediments to *yoga*, such as ignorance, ego, desire, and so on, are purified, as they must be cleared from the mind for higher Truths to manifest therein. This is the case with all *yoga* practice—for instance, the *kriyā yoga* practice of the *Yoga Sūtras*, performed “to weaken the *kleśas* so as to bring about *samādhi*” (II.1–2ff.). *Bhakti* is no different (in the chapter “Definition of *Bhakti*,” we noted that the removal of the *kleśas* is one of the six accompanying qualities of *bhakti* identified by Rūpa), and Jīva here situates this process as the second step in attaining the seed of *bhakti*. It is the following of the practices of *bhakti* that removes the impediments to the actual manifestation of *bhakti* itself: “Just as gold, when heated by fire, relinquishes its impurities and attains again its original nature, so the mind, through the performance of *bhakti yoga*, is purified of its accumulation of *karma* and attains to Me” (XI.14.25). As throughout the *Gītā*,² and hinted at in the *Yoga Sūtras*,³ such purification is gained by grace: “To those who hear His narratives, Kṛṣṇa, who is the friend of the truthful and is situated within the heart, cleanses inauspicious things. Hearing about Him and performing His *kīrtana* are purifying” (I.2.17).⁴ The aspirant is at this stage deepening the process of becoming a *bhakta* in his or her own right.

As a consequence of purification, the third step, the dawning of *bhakti*, can then ensue: “When almost all inauspicious things are destroyed by means of constant service to the *bhāgavatas*, then unshakable *bhakti* for *Bhagavān*, who is praised in the best of verses, manifests” (I.2.18). The word “almost” here indicates that *bhakti* appears even while there are still traces of ignorance and *prakṛti*-related desires, says Jīva (*anu* 13).⁵ In the fourth step, after all desires have been completely destroyed, “then the mind, situated in *sattva* and not being agitated by states of *rajas* and *tamas*—lust, greed, and so on—becomes content” (I.2.19). In *bhakti*, when the mind becomes joyful by the practices, it automatically abandons lust, simply by dint of a higher taste (*Gītā* II.59). Experiencing the bliss of *bhakti*, one’s status and self-identification as a *bhakta* have now pervaded deep into one’s very being. The practitioner’s mind in this penultimate step is in a state of pure

sattva and “becomes qualified for direct experience (*sākṣātkāra*) into the nature of *Bhagavān*” (*anu* 16).

Finally, in the fifth step, this actual direct encounter with *Īśvara* can take place, and any residual imperfection at this point is completely destroyed. As with the *mokṣa* traditions in general,⁶ the claim here is experience: “Direct realization of the Truth of *Bhagavān*⁷ manifests for one whose mind is content and who is free from attachment through the practice of *bhakti yoga* in this way. When *Īśvara* is seen (*dṛṣṭa*) within oneself, the knot [of ego] in the heart is broken, all doubts are destroyed, and *karma* is weakened for that person” (I.2.20–21). The practitioner’s status as a *bhakta* can now never be shaken or compromised. We need to stress again that this “direct experience” of *Īśvara* is visual (although *Īśvara* can also manifest sonically and in other ways, as we discussed). The ultimate cherished goal of the *bhakta* is a “vision” of God—the personal God with form and qualities discussed previously. This vision can manifest within the “heart” of the practitioner, or externally to the senses, as we will see in the Tale of Prince Dhruva: Viṣṇu, on account of the intensity of Dhruva’s mature *yoga* practice, appeared in the lotus of Dhruva’s heart, effulgent as lightning. After this, Dhruva observed that He suddenly disappeared. [Opening his eyes,] Dhruva then saw Him standing outside in the same position. Seeing that vision, Dhruva was thrown into confusion. He prostrated his body on the ground like a stick⁸ and offered obeisances. Beholding Lord Viṣṇu, the boy was as if drinking Him with his eyes, kissing Him with his mouth, and embracing Him with his arms. (IV.9.1–2) The “lotus of Dhruva’s heart” refers to the mind: the heart has been identified as the locus of both the *citta* and the *ātman* since the Upaniṣads.⁹ Since the mind, *citta*, is external to consciousness, *Īśvara*’s form can manifest in the mind, subtle *prakṛti*, just as it can manifest in gross *prakṛti*. Both layerings of *prakṛti* are in fact external to consciousness itself, even as one appears to be “internal” and one “external” from the perspective of the sensual apparatus of the physical eyes (see *Yoga Sūtras* III.7–8). We have discussed how such visions can

deepen into witnessing not just Kṛṣṇa's form and qualities, but His active pastimes (*līlā*) and the possibility of eventually personally participating in them for all eternity in the liberated state. The spiritual (*Brahman*) body and mind required for this will be discussed later.

Returning to the five consecutive stages of *bhakti*, Jīva recognizes that until direct experience transpires, there cannot be complete and utter freedom from doubt (*anu* 16).¹⁰ One risks the danger of fanaticism if one does not entertain some level of doubt about that which one has not experienced. But after direct experience, doubt evaporates and there is nothing left to do but remain immersed in the bliss of continued *bhakti*: “After *Īśvara* is seen within oneself, the poet-sages always engage in great ecstasy in *bhakti* for *Bhagavān* Vāsudeva, which satisfies the mind” (I.2.21–22). In any event, for our present purposes, in answer to the question we initially raised, the first seed of *bhakti*, which eventually culminates in the fruit of this type of direct experience of *Īśvara* and subsequent immersion in the bliss of a *bhakti* relationship with Him—in other words, the process of becoming a *bhakta*—is triggered by an initial encounter with an advanced *bhakta* or *bhaktas*. This is repeatedly stressed throughout the *Bhāgavata*: “Someone wandering [in the cycle of *saṁsāra*] who encounters a holy person, O Kṛṣṇa, attains the end of material existence. Such an encounter allows an inclination to take root toward You” (X.51.54).¹¹

Such encounters reflect the compassion of advanced *bhaktas* who, rather than enjoying their ecstasies in seclusion, make themselves available: “Auspicious devotees of Kṛṣṇa wander around out of compassion for those unrighteous and very miserable people who, out of misfortune, have become averse to Kṛṣṇa” (III.5.3). As with the Buddhist *Bodhisattva* tradition, some sages, such as child Prahlaḍa, even renounce their own liberation so as to help others in their spiritual quest: “Often, O God, sages, desirous of their own liberation, cultivate silence in a solitary place; they are not concerned with the welfare of others. But I have no desire for liberation for myself alone, abandoning these

unfortunate souls. Other than You, I see no other refuge for one wandering [in *saṁsāra*]” (VII.9.44).

In sum, the role of the *bhaktas* in the planting of the first seeds of *bhakti* in others is indispensable. Kṛṣṇa informs Uddhava that “neither the practice of *yoga*, nor the study of Sāṅkhya, nor the pursuit of *dharma*, nor study of sacred texts (*svādhyāya*), nor austerities (*tapas*) and renunciation, nor ritualistic performances, nor charity, nor vows, nor sacrificial hymns, nor visiting holy places, nor the moral abstentions and observances (*yama* and *niyama*) attract Me as much as the association of saints” (XI.12.1–2). As mentioned, the reason for this is that *bhaktas* are constantly immersed in meditating on the activities and qualities of *Īśvara*: Narrations about Me are always taking place among those greatly blessed souls, and these narrations purify the vices of those who hear them. Those who attentively hear them, recite them, and delight in them, holding Me as their Lord with faith, attain love for Me. I am *Brahman* of unlimited qualities, and My nature is blissful experience. What else is there to be desired for those saints who have attained *bhakti* for Me? Just as cold, fear, and darkness are dispelled for one taking shelter of fire, so it is with service to the saints. (XI.26.28–31) The tale of the genesis of his own spiritual journey is recounted by sage Nārada in part 2, and exemplifies how one who became the greatest *bhakta* of all¹² began his devotional journey by dint of the fact that his mother was a maidservant to a community of sages. This afforded the young Nārada the opportunity to hear from and serve these great souls: Permitted by the sages to eat the remnants of their food, I partook of it once daily, and from this all my sins were destroyed.¹³ Engaged in this manner, with purified mind, a personal interest in their religion developed firmly in me. From this, by their kindness, I went on listening to the captivating narrations of Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes that were recited by them. Listening attentively to every word of those narrations with faith, an attraction arose in me for Kṛṣṇa. Hearing about Him is so pleasing to the heart, O great sages! Then, once I had developed this attraction, my mind became firmly fixed in Kṛṣṇa. Narrations about Him are so relishable. As a result,

I could perceive that due to my illusion, this gross and subtle reality had been imagined to be in me, whereas I am actually the Supreme *Brahman*. (I.5.25–27) In fact, the entire *Bhāgavata* text is spoken under this principle of great devotees transmitting the seeds of *bhakti*. The imparting of the teachings of the *Bhāgavata* in the first place is triggered by King Parīkṣit, who has seven days left to live, encountering sage Śuka. As a consequence, Śuka imparts the *Bhāgavata* to him, to the gratitude of the king: The king said: “*Aho!* The human birth is the most excellent of all births. What good is there in other births—even in that other world [the celestial realm]—if there is not the abundant association of great souls, whose minds are purified by the glories of Kṛṣṇa? There is nothing to be amazed at in the fact that sins are destroyed, and pure *bhakti* to Kṛṣṇa occurs from the dust of Your lotus feet. My ignorance, rooted in false reasoning, has been destroyed by a moment of Your association.” (V.13.21–22) Indirectly, then, the *Bhāgavata* as text positions itself as embodying this association with advanced *bhaktas* in the form of recording and preserving their narratives as well as the descriptions of Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās*. Thus, just as those fortunate enough to have taken birth when Kṛṣṇa incarnated on earth attained perfection, the text claims that “those born after Kṛṣṇa’s departure to His abode who are fortunate enough to encounter the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, listen to it, read it, and contemplate it with a devoted heart, will likewise attain liberation” (XII.13.18). Reading the *Bhāgavata* thus constitutes a powerful means of initially beginning (or, if begun, deepening) one’s devotional life.

Satsaṅga and the Guru

Within this context of receiving the first seeds of *bhakti* from the fellowship of other *bhaktas*, called *satsaṅga* (literally the “coming together of saints”), Jīva then focuses more specifically on the figure of the *guru* as the most important element of this *satsaṅga*. He notes that there are two types of neophytes (or, perhaps more precisely, approaches adopted by newcomers) when encountering the association of *bhaktas* (*anu* 202). The first, which I venture to state is by far the most common,

is that a beginner, inspired by a particular *bhakta* or association of *bhaktas*, accepts a person from their ranks as spiritual teacher. Typically, one subsequently becomes interested in hearing about *Īśvara* in the mode *Īśvara* is understood in that tradition. In other words, one is initially attracted by a community or by a charismatic and then simply inherits the form of *Īśvara* and, we can add, sectarian metaphysical and theological specifics through which *Īśvara* is received in that community (such as those that will be touched upon in “The Object of *Bhakti*”). The newcomer eventually worships that form in the specific ritualistic manner, filtered through the philosophical and theological categories, that defines that community. As an aside, we see this phenomenon clearly from the examples of the lineage-embedded Hindu teachers who came to the West in the 1960s. Their disciples were initially attracted by the *guru*’s charisma, and only subsequently, sometimes after many years, did some of these students begin to excavate more fully the specificities and complexities of the teacher’s lineage tradition—be it Kaśmir Śaivism, *advaita Vedānta*, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, or others (and in some cases, such as in some of the Krishnamācārya-derived *yoga* schools, have for the most part still to seriously engage with, in this case, the twelfth-century theologian Rāmānuja’s lineage, Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, with its philosophical tradition, *viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta*, of their founding teachers).

In such association, continues Jīva, one studies the requisite texts associated with that tradition, engaging them in the manner established by Vedānta exegesis (methods of interpretation),¹⁴ deliberating on their import and dispelling doubts and misconceptions as to their Truths. Simultaneously, the aspirant gradually develops faith in the form of *Īśvara* central to that tradition as well as an emotional attachment to that form. Typically, this involves viewing that form as primary among all other forms of *Īśvara* and carefully adopting the ritualistic and meditative *bhakti* practices associated with that form, according to the specifics of that tradition (such as performing *japa*, *mantra* repetition of the name of that form, as one’s meditation practice).

Jīva considers this first type of approach an analytical path, which he

contrasts with the second approach, which is guided by taste (*anu* 202) that transcends the analytical mind. By “taste” (*ruci*), he intends the natural attraction spontaneously experienced when directing the mind to *Īśvara*, a corollary of *rāga*. While the association of *bhaktas* is the trigger for both types of aspirants, there are those who immediately experience attraction for the narrations of *Īśvara* once they hear them; they do not need to cultivate their devotion or analyze it. For this type of *bhakta*, deliberation and study are not requisite ingredients.¹⁵ But here, too, since relishing any kind of taste is the product of past experience recorded in the *citta* (that is, *saṁskāra*), one can surmise that this second type of aspirant who experiences immediate attraction had previously practiced *bhakti* in past lives to reach this stage. Therefore, Jīva suggests that such a fortunate newcomer should worship the form of *Īśvara* to which he or she is already spontaneously attracted (XI.3.48 and XI.27.7); those preexisting *saṁskāras* are already in place.

Eventually, the person from whom one begins to hear teachings, or someone from the community of such people, becomes the *śikṣā guru*, “instructing teacher,” says Jīva (*anu* 202). While a person may have many *śikṣā gurus*, an aspirant generally accepts one of them as the primary guide in the specifics of practice and worship, and this person is known as the *dīkṣā guru*, “initiating *guru*.” This *guru* initiates one into the lineage, and one’s primary spiritual allegiance is subsequently offered to him or her. This choice of a *guru* is a matter of taste: One seeking knowledge of the ultimate welfare should approach a *guru* who is learned in the scripture, absorbed in *Brahman*, and is the abode of peace. Holding the *guru* as his own self and as the Lord, and attending him free from deceit, one should learn the *Bhāgavata dharma*. By this, Hari, the *ātman* [of the universe] and the one who bestows realization of the *ātman*, is pleased. (XI.3.21) The *bhakta* who takes the role of *guru* is the most important entity to emerge from *satsaṅga*, or the company of the *bhaktas*: “I [Kṛṣṇa] am not as satisfied by worship, [high] birth, austere practices and tranquillity of mind as I am by obedience to the *guru*” (X.80.34). Rūpa lists sixty-four practices that constitute *vaidhī bhakti*,

from which he identifies the first three as the most important (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* II.83), all of them featuring the *guru*: “taking shelter at the feet of the *guru*, accepting initiation (*dīkṣā*) and instruction from the *guru*, and rendering service to the *guru*” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* II.74). These are essentially a rewording of the *Gītā*, where seeking the shelter of the *guru* takes the form of rendering service in exchange for receiving guidance: “The learned ones who have seen the Truth can impart that knowledge to you; know that Truth through humble submission, inquiry, and rendering service to them” (VI.34).

Without a *guru*, progress on the spiritual journey is hard going: “Addicted to hundreds of vices, those in this world who neglect the *guru*, and who attempt to control the wild horse of the uncontrolled and very fickle mind through restraint of the breathing and of the senses, become frustrated with their methods. They are like the merchant on the ocean who has not taken a helmsman” (X.87.33). Since the *guru* delivers *Īśvara*, he or she is treated with the greatest respect: “The *guru* is a manifestation of *Bhagavān* Himself, who bestows the light of knowledge. If one thinks of the *guru* as an imperfect human being, all one’s scriptural knowledge is wasted, like the bathing of an elephant [who immediately then goes and again rolls around in the sand]” (VII.15.26). And again: “One should consider the *ācārya* (*guru*) to be I Myself [Kṛṣṇa] and never disrespect him or think him to be a common person. The *guru* is the embodiment of all the celestials” (XI.17.27). From the other side, the *guru* too has a responsibility: “One should not be a *guru*, one should not be a relative, one should not be a father, one should not be a mother, one should not be a celestial being, and one should not be a husband, if one cannot liberate [one’s dependents] from engagement with the process of death (*saṁsāra*)” (V.5.18).

This might be a good occasion to introduce the first verse from one of Rūpa’s other works, the *Upadeśāmṛta*, (*Nectar of Instruction*), which lists six minimal qualifications necessary for anyone who assumes the role of *guru* in guiding others on their spiritual journey: “The person of fixed

mind, *dhīra*, who can control the urge (*vega*) to speak, the urges of the mind and of anger, and the urges of the tongue, belly, and genitals, is qualified to teach all over the world” (1). The *guru* can obviously not lead a disciple beyond the impulses of the body and mind to any higher reality that might exist if he or she has not personally surpassed them. Relevant here is Arjuna’s question in the *Gītā* pertaining to the characteristics of the *dhīra* (the sage whose mind is fixed on the goals of yoga)¹⁶ and Kṛṣṇa’s extensive responses, all featuring absence of desire as a central feature (II.54–72).¹⁷ Detachment and absence of desire are characteristics of the advanced practitioner of all the *mokṣa* traditions. Even Patañjali, in his usual oblique and understated manner, points to the possibility of fixing the mind on a *guru*-like figure but qualifies that such a person must be “free of desire” (*vīta-rāga*, *Yoga Sūtras* I.37).

Given the life of extreme austerity Jīva, the other *Gosvāmīs*, and their fellow radically renounced ascetics were leading in Vṛndāvana in the sixteenth century, in contrast to the spectacle of the extravagant lifestyles and controversial behaviors surrounding many modern-day charismatics, it goes without saying that genuine *bhaktas*, completely enamored with their beloved *Īśvara*, have no attachment to material things. They thus seek no personal gain from their disciples: “O Lord with the lotus navel! Those who associate with Your devotees, whose hearts are enamored by the fragrance of Your lotus feet, forget about this mortal life, sons, friends, households, wealth, and wives” (IV.9.12).

The centrality of *bhakta* association, then, and of the *guru* in particular, simply cannot be overstressed, and Jīva returns to it again and again throughout his work, following the leads of the *Bhāgavata*: “*Samsāra* is the continued cycle of ignorance of a living being who in reality is *ātman*. The remedy is supreme *bhakti* to the *guru*” (IV.29.36); “Through service of a topmost *bhāgavata* devotee, the intense experience of love¹⁸ will manifest for the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa, who removes all vice” (III.7.19); “[Attaining] the celestial realm or liberation is not equal to even half a moment’s association with a *bhāgavata* devotee; what then to speak of the blessings of mortal beings?” (IV.24.57¹⁹); “A sinful person

does not purify himself as much through such things as austerity, as one whose life is devoted to Kṛṣṇa does by service to Kṛṣṇa’s devotees” (VI.1.16). Association with such *bhāgavatas* overrides all other *bhakti* practices, including the nine standard ones discussed previously, and can award the desired result independently of any other means (although Jīva hastens to add that the other practices should not thereby be discarded! *anu* 283–84): By merely *satsaṅga*, the association of saints, in different *yugas* [ages], those whose nature was *rajas* and *tamas*, even demons ... animals, birds;... various kinds of celestial beings;... and, among humans, merchants, laborers, women;²⁰ and many others, attained My abode. They did not study the Veda, nor serve great *mahātmās*, nor undertake vows or *tapas*, but attained Me through the association of saints. Indeed, merely by their love (*bhāva*) did the *gopī* cowherding women, the cows, deer, and other simpleminded beings such as snakes attain perfection and easily come to Me” (XI.12.3–5).

Some of these remarks about animals and such become clearer in part 3 after reading the narratives of the tenth book, where all the flora and fauna in the entire landscape of Vraja adores Kṛṣṇa, but what should be clear at this point is that this love, *bhāva*, is attained from those who already have *bhāva*: the *satsaṅga* of *bhaktas*. And from among them, the *guru* is particular. And just like *rāga* for Kṛṣṇa Himself, attachment to the *guru* and the *satsaṅga* is a completely different affair from the attachments to the other personages and objects of *prakṛti* that the *bhakta*, just like any other *yogī*, is striving to transcend: “Attachment, when placed in unrighteous people out of ignorance, is the cause of *saṁsāra*; but when placed in the saints, it leads to non-attachment” (III.23.55).

Having said all this, however, and given the seemingly never-ending scandals and controversies associated with many modern-day *gurus* (and past ones, too),²¹ we feel obliged to quote Rūpa’s cautionary note here that “*bhakti* that is promoted by means of wealth and numerous disciples is discounted, because it loses the highest state through distancing [one

from Hari because of these distractions]” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* II.259). This statement speaks for itself. Additionally, and related to the same point, students familiar with the non-negotiability of the *yamas* and *niyamas* (moral and ethical restraints and observances)²² in generic *yoga*—which Patañjali, with uncharacteristic emphasis, stresses are a mandatory and absolute “great vow” irrespective of any criteria such as time, place, circumstance, and condition (II.31)—will soon notice that they do not find a place in the list of the nine main practices of *bhakti*, or even in the much more expansive list of sixty-four practices outlined by Rūpa. This is because the groundwork laid down by texts such as the *Yoga Sūtras* is taken for granted in *bhakti*: “For one absorbed in Kṛṣṇa, the *yamas* and *niyamas* such as cleanliness (*śauca*) and the others are automatically present, hence they are not specifically included under the limbs (*aṅga*) of *bhakti*; qualities such as *ahimsā*, etc., are not remarkable: those engaged in *bhakti* to Hari automatically never harm others”²³ (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant II.261–62). Such basics are so obvious and generic for all mainstream schools of *yoga*, they are assumed by Jīva and Rūpa.

Given the importance of the issue—and the enormous psychological damage caused to the disillusioned disciples of the numerous *guru* figures who have succumbed to scandals—we feel obliged to reiterate that anyone posturing as a *guru* without adhering to the *yamas* and *niyamas*, or who presents some theological or esoteric justification for deviancy from these, is completely at odds with the *Bhāgavata* tradition, Patañjali’s *yoga*, and practically all orthodox Indic schools, including the Buddhist and Jain traditions. And, needless to say, genuine saints would never exploit the service rendered them by those seeking guidance on the devotional path: “They are peaceful, impartial, focused on Me, calm, see all beings equally, free of any sense of proprietorship, free of ego, above all dualities, and free of coveting (*aparigraha*)” (XI.26.27). We note that charisma is not a listed ingredient. There is much that could be said here, as the abusive potential of the *guru* disciple relationship is obvious,²⁴ but such descriptions in the sacred texts at least provide a

standard against which the behavior and qualities of *guru* figures can be gauged.

The Varieties of Saints

As will be discussed in some detail from a more philosophical perspective in “The Object of *Bhakti*,” there are two basic categories of *mahant*, or great enlightened personalities, recognized by the *Bhāgavata* tradition. There are those absorbed in *Brahman* (that is, their inner *ātman* self) and those absorbed in *Bhagavān*: “The *mahants* are both either the *sādhus* who are equanimous in mind,²⁵ peaceful, free of anger, and well-wishers to all, or they are those whose goal is to establish affection for Me as Lord” (V.5.2–3). The first of these is considered great, says Jīva, because of awareness of the *ātman*, the other because of awareness of *Bhagavān* (*anu* 186). However, their quality of greatness is not the same: “Even among thousands who are liberated and perfected [that is, who have realized the *ātman*], a peaceful soul who is devoted to Nārāyaṇa [Viṣṇu] is very rare” (VI.14.5). Put more emphatically, “Liberation is not comparable with even a moment of association with *Bhagavān*’s devotees” (I.18.13). The *Gītā* too notes that “from many thousands of people, barely anyone strives for perfection, and from those striving or already perfected, barely one knows Me as I am” (VII.3). Nonetheless, since we will be focusing primarily on the *bhakta* absorbed in *Bhagavān* in this volume, we should take a moment to at least note the extraordinary characteristics of the other type of great personality, the sage absorbed in the nondual awareness of *Brahman* in the form of the *ātman*: His consciousness is withdrawn from the external world. He should remain silent, absorbed in the experience of his own inner bliss, free of desire, his thirst extinguished. If, nonetheless, he sometimes still perceives this world, which has been rejected by his intelligence as unreal, as the memory will persist until the end of life, it will not cause any illusion. A perfected being does not perceive whether the perishable body, through which he has realized the true self (*svarūpa*),²⁶ is seated or arisen, or whether, by chance, it has gone off somewhere, or, under the

control of Fate, returned.²⁷ He is like a person intoxicated by alcohol who does not know if his cloth is still covering him. The body along with the life air will continue, under the control of Fate, for as long as the *karma* that has been activated for that life has not run out.²⁸ But one who has mastered the state of the *yoga* of *samādhi* does not again participate in the forms of the world, any more than a person upon waking up participates in the objects of a dream. (XI.13.35–37) The reason such *Brahman* realization is not sought after by *bhaktas*, says Jīva, is that it eliminates the distinction between *Bhagavān* and the *jīva* (or, through Vaiṣṇava perspectives, it is a state in which consciousness is not aware of the eternally distinct *Īśvara* owing to being exclusively absorbed in its own nature of pure consciousness). Without this distinction, there can be no *bhakti* (*anu* 188) and, consequently, no bliss from personal association with *Īśvara*. As we have noted, the *Īśvara*-derived bliss is held to be incomparably greater than the *ātman*-derived one. Hence the many frequent statements throughout the text that the *bhaktas* have no interest in this *Brahman* type of liberation and, indeed, reject it even if offered: “Some *bhāgavatas* do not desire attaining the state of oneness with the *ātman*; they are satisfied with the service of My feet and long for Me. Congregating together, they praise My wonderful deeds” (III.25.34).

The second type of *mahant* is the *bhakta*. Jīva hierarchizes this type into three categories, gleaned, as always, from the *Bhāgavata*: *uttama bhaktas*, highest; *madhyama bhaktas*, intermediate; and *prākṛta bhaktas*, materialistic (*anu* 187–90). From these: “The highest devotee (*bhāgavata-uttamaḥ*) is one who sees the presence of his *Bhagavān* in all beings, and all beings within *Bhagavān*” (XI.2.45). This superlative type of *bhakta* has a universalizing vision similar to that of the *Brahman*-realized *yogī* in the quote above, except that his equanimity is not based just on the ability to perceive the *ātman* in all beings but is bolstered by an awareness that these *ātmans* are in fact manifestations and parts of *Īśvara*. But, more than this, his mind is primarily absorbed in thoughts of the deeds and

activities of *Īśvara*, personal *Brahman*, rather than in the passive experience of the *ātman*, nonpersonal *Brahman*. This additional element expresses itself more conspicuously in the behavior of this category of *bhakta* compared with that of the standard *ātman/Brahman*-absorbed *yogī*: Let him wander around without attachment in this world, hearing about those most auspicious incarnations and deeds of Hari, the bearer of the discus,²⁹ singing without embarrassment songs and names associated with these. Following this vow, his love awakened and his heart melted while chanting loudly the names of his beloved Lord, he laughs, he weeps, he cries out, he sings, and he dances like a madman, completely indifferent to social norms. With exclusive devotion, he pays respect to the sky, wind, fire, water, earth, stars, living beings, directions, trees and vegetation, rivers, and oceans, and every created thing as the body of Hari. (XI.2.39–42) While both *Brahman*-realized and *Īśvara*-absorbed *yogīs* are immersed in states of consciousness beyond the *guṇas* of *prakṛti* and are thus behaviorally beyond conventional social norms, the *Bhāgavata* presents the *uttama bhakta* as manifesting intense characteristics of ecstasy that are symptomatically quite different from the peaceful and withdrawn symptoms of the *yogī* immersed in the *ātman*. These states of mind reflect the greater degree of ecstasy experienced from contact with the personal *Īśvara* in comparison with the experience of the bliss inherent in the impersonal *ātman*. Moreover, in this state, the world is perceived everywhere as a manifestation of the Beloved, rather than merely a false or temporary illusory obstacle to be avoided or transcended (similar in some ways to the enlightened perception of the world according to Kaśmir Śaivism).

As we have noted, the *gopīs*, the simplehearted, uneducated, cowherding maidens we will encounter in part 3, are heralded as the highest of all *yogīs* and indeed exhibit the vision noted in the last line of the above quote pertaining to the devotionally surcharged perceptions of the inanimate world. For them, “the trees and creeping plants of the forest seem to be experiencing Viṣṇu in themselves. Richly endowed

with fruits and flowers, the trees pour forth streams of honey, their young branches bowing reverentially with their load, and their bodies bristling with the ecstasy of love” (X.35.9). In the *gopīs*’ God-intoxicated vision, the entire natural world appears to be worshipping Hari in ecstatic love: “The rivers found their force disrupted by their states of mind after hearing the sound of Mukunda’s [Kṛṣṇa’s] flute, as could be seen from their whirlpools. Bearing offerings of lotus flowers, the rivers grasped the two feet of Murāri [Kṛṣṇa] and embraced them closely with their arms in the form of waves” (X.21.15).

Before leaving the landscape of Vraj reflected in these verses, where Kṛṣṇa passed His childhood days, to consider the other two types of *bhaktas*—the *madhyama*, intermediate, and *prākṛta*, materialistic devotees—it is worth revisiting the notion of *yogamāyā* and connecting that discussion to the mind-set of the highest *bhaktas*, the *uttamas*: “Whether one knows or does not know who I am—the extent and nature of My being—if someone worships Me with unalloyed devotion, that person is considered an *uttama bhakta*” (XI.11.33). This lack of awareness referred to here of who God actually is, is fundamental to the highest states of *bhakti* that will be encountered in part 3 in the stories from the tenth book—specifically, among Kṛṣṇa’s family members and the cowherding community in Vṛndāvana. These simple folks are depicted in the text as having performed *bhakti* for many, many lives before their devotion reached the requisite intensity that earned them a birth in intimate proximity to Kṛṣṇa during His descent, but they are all *uttama bhaktas*: their love is so intense that, aided by *yogamāyā*, it overrides awareness even of Kṛṣṇa’s majesty and obliterates even the knowledge that Kṛṣṇa is God. Their devotion has reached such a peak that they can think of Kṛṣṇa only as their lover, friend, child, and the like, depending on their *bhāva*.

The second type of *bhakta mahant* discussed by Jīva is the *madhyama bhakta*, the “middle level” or intermediate *bhakta*. His or her characteristics reflect a schema that was widespread among the soteriological schools (surfacing, for instance, in *Yoga Sūtras* I.33 and as

the *brahma-vihāras* in various Buddhist *suttas*),³⁰ but here with variations in phraseology to reflect the *Bhāgavata*'s devotionality: "The *madhyama* acts with love (*prema*) for *Īśvara*, friendship (*maitrī*) toward those devoted to Him, compassion (*kṛpā*) toward the ignorant, and equanimity (*upekṣā*) toward the envious" (XI.2.46). In this type of awareness characteristic of the *madhyama*, we see judgmental behavior, albeit benevolent, based on the perception of distinctions among living beings, in contrast to the *uttama bhakta*'s feelings of love for all beings as manifestations of *Īśvara* with no sense of differentiation.

The third category of *bhakta mahant*, the materialist (*prākṛta*) devotee, is far more restricted in his or her ability to perceive the omnipresence of *Īśvara*: "One who offers *pūjā* (worship) to Hari in the form of the deity with faith, but not to the *bhaktas* or to other people, is a worldly devotee" (XI.2.47). Such a neophyte practitioner who differentiates, says Jīva, and who does not have reverence for all beings, has not developed love of God. Such a person is either new to the path, or devoid of deep study, or expressing devotion only out of social convention (*anu* 190). Jīva further characterizes such a person (somewhat unflatteringly) with this quote from the *Bhāgavata*: "One who identifies this corpse made of the three elements to be the self, considers his wife and family to be his own, holds the earth to be worthy of worship, understands water to be sacred, but does not accept those who are wise, is truly a donkey or a cow" (X.84.13).

Jīva then considers these three divisions of *bhaktas* from the perspective of the attitude toward *dharma* and social conventions exhibited by each of them, respectively. The worldly (*prākṛta*) devotee performs *bhakti* mixed with other concerns, such as attachment to the performance of *dharma*, as discussed previously in the analysis of "mixed *bhakti*." The *madhyama* (intermediate) *bhakta* renounces *dharma* in his or her complete dedication to the service of *Īśvara* but is still aware of the conventional norms and results pertaining to *dharma* and *adharma*, and so in this minor sense the uninhibited and full immersion of the mind in *bhakti* is mildly delimited. Additionally, the *bhakta*'s devotion is also

curtailed by knowledge of God’s majesty and omnipotency in this stage. But the *uttama bhakta* is so immersed in love of God that he or she has no awareness of whether his or her behavior conforms to *dharma* whatsoever—indeed, entertains no considerations of *dharma* or social gradations in the first place. And as we have seen with the *rāgātmika bhaktas*, the devotee at this stage often has no awareness of the majesty and supreme ontological status of God Himself even when entering into very intimate relationships with Him.

Before concluding this section on the varieties of *bhaktas*, we can include Rūpa’s hierarchization of devotees in his *Upadeśāmṛta*, but here with the purpose of suggesting how one should appropriately interact in a devotional environment with different levels of *bhaktas*: One should offer respect in the mind toward one who utters the name “Kṛṣṇa”; one should offer respect with obeisances to one who has taken spiritual initiation into a Vaiṣṇava lineage (*dīkṣā*) and is worshipping *Īśvara*; and one should offer respect by seeking the cherished association of, and serving and hearing from one whose heart is completely cleansed of faults such as criticizing others, and who is mature in full absorption in devotional practices. (5) Rūpa also cautions us not to judge *bhaktas* by any type of bodily criteria, including caste, social status, or any other such material designations: One should not look upon the *prakṛtic* (material) nature of a person who is a *bhakta* here in this world, nor at the visible defects of his or her body which are attained at birth due to past-life *karma*. The transcendent (*Brahman*) essence of the waters of the *Gaṅgā* river is lost [if one looks at] the quality of the water, with its bubbles, foam, and mud. (6) Rūpa makes one further set of relevant comments as to what transpires between *bhaktas* in addition to their discussions about Kṛṣṇa: “The six signs of love [between *bhaktas*] are: giving gifts and receiving them; inquiring confidentially and revealing one’s mind confidentially; and offering and accepting foodstuffs” (4). This is not the place to embark on a discussion of the *āśrama* experiences of the various forms of *yoga* transplanted to the West in the 1960s, but without such loving reciprocations and honest exchanges of

confidentialities that Rūpa notes, life in communities of practitioners can very easily and quickly become institutionalized, hierarchical, judgmental, spiritually oppressive, and, all too often, abusive.

The Liberated *Bhakta*: Different Types of *Mokṣa* in the *Bhāgavata*

We can conclude this section on the *bhakta* by considering the ultimate destinations that the accomplished and perfected practitioners can attain in the postmortem liberated state. Let us recall that the *Bhāgavata*'s definition of *bhakti* quoted at the outset was that those who perform it were “so free of motive ... that, without service to [Kṛṣṇa], they do not accept the five types of liberation, even if these are offered. We have made several references to these varying types of liberation and it is now time to discuss them. These are: residing in the same abode as Viṣṇu (*sālokya*), having the same opulence as Him (*sārṣṭi*), being close to Him (*sāmīpya*), having the same form as Him (*sārūpya*), and merging into Him (*ekatvam*)” (III.29.12–14).

In the *Bhāgavata* schema expressed in this verse, the generic goal of conventional *yoga* corresponds to the fifth item on the list, *ekatvam*, “the state of oneness.” It is described by Patañjali as “the immersion of the seer [consciousness] within its own nature” (*draṣṭuḥ svarupe 'vasthānam*, I.3). We have been referring to this variously as the experience of *ātman*, realization of *Brahman*, or impersonal realization (and will be referring to it in the next section as the monistic experience). Other terms include *kaivalya*, “oneness”; *ātma-jñāna*, “awareness of the self”; *nirvāṇa*, literally “blowing out”;³¹ and the by now familiar synonyms *mokṣa* and *mukti*.

We can briefly note in passing that there are differences in how this “oneness” is understood in certain *jñāna* and *yoga* traditions. In *advaita Vedānta*, for example, there is only one Supreme *Ātman*, which is in fact the nondual *Brahman*, as we will discuss in the next section; so in liberation, when consciousness attains this state, it loses all sense of individuality as well as awareness of the world of duality, which were both illusory in the first place according to *advaita* tenets. In this state consciousness is aware of only “one” experience—its own nature of pure,

blissful, eternal consciousness. For the Sāṅkhya and Yoga traditions, the liberated *ātman* maintains individuality and the world remains real, but, absorbed in its own infinite nature, pure consciousness is aware neither of the real world nor of other individual *ātman*s whether liberated or not. We would suggest that although the scholastics of the former school posit that in ultimate reality there is only one infinite *ātman* and no real world, and those of the latter maintain that there is an eternal plurality of infinite *ātman*s and an eternally real world, this is an intellectually constructed issue. From an experiential point of view, their experiences appear identical: an awareness of nothing other than eternal and infinite awareness free from all suffering.³² Hence, all these traditions can lay claim to terms such as *ekatvam*, “oneness,” and its synonym *kaivalya* (as well as the term *jñāna*, “knowing”), to describe this experience. In other words, in this state it is irrelevant if the world is real or not, or if there are other individual *ātman*s simultaneously absorbed in this experience, or if they have all merged into one undifferentiated unity, as the experience of *ekatvam* itself is trans-spatial (infinite) and transtemporal (eternal) and devoid of any notion of “individuality” and “world out there” at all. This is because there is no *buddhi*, intellect, covering the *ātman* deliberating on such things. It is only for the scholastics left behind embedded in their intellect, mind, and senses for which such issues are important and become the basis for debate among schools.

In keeping with these traditions, the *Bhāgavata* recognizes this impersonal experience of oneness, *ekatvam*, as one of the five types of liberation. Like these other schools, it accepts it to be a state in which the *ātman* has no form or qualities and that the experience of the *ātman* in this state is exclusively one of *sat-cit-ānanda* (being, consciousness, and bliss). It accepts everything noted above that *advaita* or Sāṅkhya posit about that state experientially. However, when *bhakti yoga* to *Īśvara* is practiced rather than *jñāna* or *yoga*, the *Bhāgavata* tradition (and Vaiṣṇavism in general) posits that there are four other types of liberation that become available in addition to *ekatvam* and that these bestow divine (*Brahman*) personal transcendent forms and qualities on the

individual *ātman* when liberated. We can note in passing that the *Vedānta Sūtras*, in its characteristically minimalistic and truncated way, also recognizes that there is an option in liberation as to whether the released souls attain a liberated body or not (IV.4.11–12), as does the ancient *Mokṣadharma* section of the *Mahābhārata* epic (196.21–22).

God too has a divine bodily form, or more precisely, being unlimited, has unlimited divine forms, and these inhabit divine abodes, also unlimited—the realms within *Brahman* we have touched upon called *Vaikuṇṭha*. These forms and realms are made not of *prakṛti* stuff—the three *guṇa* qualities we will discuss in the next section—but of *Brahman* stuff, pure consciousness—*sat-cit-ānanda*. There is no inert matter there (in fact, this realm of nonconscious *prakṛti* can be seen as something of a dull and imperfect reflection of those *Brahman* realms). *Vaikuṇṭha*, to borrow Abrahamic language, is the Kingdom of God. So the liberated *ātman* attains *Brahman*, but not the impersonal, formless, qualityless *Brahman* devoid of active experiences as attained in the *ekatvam* state. Just as the *ātmans* receive *prakṛti* minds, forms, relationships, and situations in this realm of *saṁsāra* that reflect their *guṇas* and *karma*, they receive *Brahman* minds, forms, relationships, and situations in the *Vaikuṇṭha* realm that reflect the nature of their *bhakti* (their *rāgas*, *bhāvas*, and so forth). With these, they engage in a loving relationship with one of the unlimited divine forms of *Īśvara* corresponding to their preference. This is not anthropomorphism, but theopomorphism (we have noted that Vaiṣṇavas would intuitively resonate with the Abrahamic idea of man being made in the image of God). Embodied beings as effects have forms, qualities, and activities because their cause has form, qualities, and activities (to an unlimited degree). So in *Vaikuṇṭha* the very realms themselves, as well as the forms of *Īśvara* and of the *bhaktas* that abide there, are made of pure, eternal, blissful consciousness (*sa-guṇa Brahman*). These forms are inconceivable: they cannot be fathomed or conceived of by the rational mind or intellect, which is limited to the spatial, temporal, and physical conditions of *prakṛti*.

Some of these relationships were discussed in *rāgānugā bhakti*, but for our present purposes, the four other liberations listed in this verse in addition to the impersonal one of *ekatvam*, include *sālokya*, residing in the same abode as Viṣṇu (that is, residing in Vaikuṇṭha, the divine realm); *sārṣṭi*, having the same opulence as Viṣṇu (omnipotency);³³ *sāmīpya*, being close to Viṣṇu (a closer and more intimate physical proximity than that of *sālokya*); and *sārūpya*, having the same form as Viṣṇu.³⁴ In other words, the liberation offered by Yoga, Sāṅkhya, *advaita Vedānta*, and other schools is of no ultimate interest to the *Bhāgavata* tradition not because these are not genuine experiential states, which the text certainly asserts that they are, but because these available options do not allow for the possibility of an eternal personal relationship with *Īśvara*. And it is this desire for eternal relationship in devotion and service that characterizes true *bhakti* in Vaiṣṇavism. Indeed, Jīva and Rūpa note here that in addition to their disinterest in merging into impersonal *Brahman* (*ekatvam*), even one of the personal types of liberation—having the same opulence as Viṣṇu (*sārṣṭi*)—is unacceptable, as both of these are not suitable for service; the others may be accepted if they enhance one’s service.³⁵

Also, from an ontological point of view, while the *Bhāgavata* describes the experience of the fifth type of liberation, *ekatvam* (also known as *sāyūjya*), in the same way as the other *jñāna* and Yoga traditions, its metaphysical understanding of the state partly differs. In his *Prīti Sandarbha* (*anu* 15), Jīva states that it can indeed denote realizing one’s own *ātman* as a part of the infinitely omnipresent *Brahman*,³⁶ more or less as proposed by the other schools (*brahma-sāyūjya*), but it can also denote merging into Kṛṣṇa’s actual body and relishing the bliss of this (*Bhagavat-sāyūjya*).³⁷ Furthermore, even with regard to the first option, *Brahman* is considered the effulgence of *Īśvara* rather than an independent essence, like the light of the sun, which, even though it can be experienced in its own right, is nonetheless always emanational from the sun itself. Jīva is not partial to either option, as each eliminates the possibility of love being expressed through service. But he nonetheless

accepts their realities.

And there are numerous other possible liberated states in the *bhakti* universe. We can very briefly refer to Kaśmir Śaivism, for example, which occupies an interesting place somewhere between *advaita Vedānta*, further discussed in the next section, and Vaiṣṇavism. It holds the world as well as Śiva's form to be eternally real (and vigorously opposes *advaita Vedānta*, which considers the world illusory on this score) but shares the latter's monism with regard to the illusoriness of the individual *ātman*. The liberated *ātman*, in this and related traditions, becomes one with Śiva (hence the *mantra* *Śivo 'ham*, "I am Śiva"). From this vantage point it need not reject the world of *prakṛti*, which in Kaśmir Śaivism is ultimately not matter but pure emanational consciousness, *citi-śakti*, and enjoy it as Śiva enjoying an expression of Himself. However, unlike in Vaiṣṇavism, the actual form of Śiva is not the ultimate expression of Truth, which, as *parama-Śiva*, is ultimately considered impersonal: *Īśvara*'s form in these Śākta systems is secondary and derivative. But it is nonetheless real and decidedly not illusory.

A different stream of Śiva-centered tradition, Śaiva Siddhānta, in contrast, does hold the *ātman* to be eternally individual and also that it attains a form of liberation that parallels the Vaiṣṇava *sārūpya*—here attaining a divine form similar to *Īśvara*'s rather than merging into Him as with Kaśmir Śaivism—but a form of *Īśvara* as *Śiva*. Liberation therefore entails a union between the liberated soul and a distinct God—a loving union between two individuals; this Śaivite school is not monistic like Kaśmir Śaivism.³⁸ So in Śaiva Siddhānta there are unlimited Śivas, even as only one is the preeminent *Īśvara* who can create universes, where in Kaśmir Śaivism there is only one Śiva and all souls merge (or realize their oneness) with Him. The Śaiva Siddhānta preference for a relationship of love between a Godhead and the liberated *ātman* in a unity of two distinct individuals is closer to the type of liberation of interest to Jīva's school than the enlightened enjoyment of *prakṛti* in the monistic oneness of Kaśmir Śaivism, even as both types are accepted as true options. So the Śaiva Siddhānta's closest parallel in

Vaiṣṇavism is the fourth from the five types of liberation (*sārūpya*), where Kāśmir Śaivism is closer to the fifth, *ekatvam* (*sāyūjya*).

In either case, from the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava perspective, Śiva abides in his own transcendent (*trans-prakṛti*) abode, which is a parallel to Viṣṇu's Vaikuṇṭha, where those devoted to him blissfully reside eternally in his company. And this abode and its residents are eternal and not derivative or a secondary manifestation of a higher transpersonal Truth. Thus, in the *Bṛhad Bhāgavatāmṛta*, a transcendental travelogue written by Sanātana, another of the six *Gosvāmīs*, Jīva's other uncle (and brother of Rūpa): Maheśa (Śiva), who increases love (*bhāva*) is non-different from beautiful Madana-Gopala [Kṛṣṇa].... In his eternal form, *Bhagavān* Śiva lives in his abode (*loka*). Eternally manifest, he is always visible to his exclusively dedicated devotees, who accept Him as their personal *iṣṭa-devatā*,³⁹ and are content to live there. He is non-different from Viṣṇu. (II.3.62–65)⁴⁰

In the next section, we will lay great stress on the essential oneness of these two forms of *Īśvara*, Viṣṇu and Śiva (as of the various forms of *Īśvarī*), despite devotional partialities.

And we can here do no more than rather superficially mention that the options continue to expand when one considers the galaxy of Devī (Goddess) traditions and the liberated states offered in those.⁴¹ Add to this that all of these traditions have seemingly never-ending subtraditions and variants, and we are faced with many different possible types of liberation being offered through *bhakti*. Irrespective of the sectarian debates between the various Vedānta and Purāṇa scholastic traditions, the *Bhāgavata*'s acceptance of five primary types of liberation, and its acknowledgment of other Śiva-associated forms of liberation, opens the door to a heterogeneous and, in principle, unlimited array of liberated possibilities reflecting the free will and partialities of the living entities. This might be expected if the Absolute is to be deemed unlimited and all-inclusive.

The possible contribution all this makes to the study of religion will

be touched upon in our “Concluding Reflections,” but we can note for now that the *Bhāgavata* questions the presupposition that the ultimate, perfected liberated state, if there is one, must be monolithic or one-size-fits-all, an assumption typically made by both believers and nonbelievers of a postmortem perfected existence. This assumption is not supported by the *Bhāgavata*. The contribution it makes to the problem of accounting for the apparent variegation of the ultimate perfected state posited by the different religions of the world is that it opens the door that all, or certainly far more than one claim, could be simultaneously correct. Experientially and ontologically true in accordance with (at least many of) the categories and conditions expressed by the religions themselves, not true in some sort of an accommodating, “politically correct,” or metaphoric sort of way. The *Bhāgavata* offers us five “standard” types of liberation (which include monotheistic and monistic possibilities) and contains a multidimensional view of reality that does not preclude unlimited other possibilities, include Śaivite-and Devī-related states of liberation. This is not unique to the *Bhāgavata*: we have noted that the *Vedānta Sūtras* also allows for the possibilities of a liberated state either with form or without, as does the *Mahābhārata*’s *Mokṣadharmā*.

And, of course, within *prakṛti*, and prior to attaining the ultimate state, similar variegation is expressed in Patañjali’s seven levels of transrational *samādhi* states (only the final state, that of *nirbīja*, is full liberation from all involvement with *prakṛti*) and with the options expressed in the *Gītā*.⁴² And while not transcendent destinations, when we factor in various other cosmological dimensionalities within *prakṛti*—the multiple (unlimited) universes emanating from Viṣṇu and the various progressively subtler celestial realms within each one—the postmortem possibilities of a progressive nature are very variegated. Granted there is hierarchy among all these transcendent states, but the Absolute, being infinite and unlimited, must be unlimitedly diverse and multifaceted for the *Bhāgavata*.

But hierarchies are important to those entrusted to preserve and

perpetuate specific *bhakti* lineages by bringing them into dialogue with the intellectual currents of their day. And so it is to the theological and philosophical understanding of *Īśvara* in sect-specific contexts that we must next turn our attention. In order to complete our analysis of *bhakti yoga* as a relationship expressed through various practices and mind-sets between a *bhakta* and a form of *Īśvara*, we must now engage a long overdue topic: an analysis of some of the ways *Īśvara* as object of *bhakti* has been construed in some important Hindu theologies.

The Object of *Bhakti*: *Īśvara*, *Bhagavān*, *Brahman*, and Divine Hierarchies

Bhakti and Other Paths of Yoga

As a prologue to discussing the nature of *Īśvara*, let us first consider a related topic Jīva raises: What is particular about *bhakti* from the perspective of *yoga* in general? There are numerous *yoga* paths claiming to free one from suffering and lead one to enlightenment; do they not all take one to the same goal? Here, we reiterate that the *Bhāgavata* shares the view common to all the *yoga* and other *mokṣa* (that is, soteriological, liberation-seeking) traditions of ancient India—namely, that ignorance of the true self is the cause of suffering, and it is suffering and frustration that initially prompt one to ponder whether there might be a state beyond suffering and hence consider a *yoga* path in the first place. After all, if one is perfectly content with one’s life, why would one wish to change—that is, seek a “path” to go somewhere else? Any *yogic* journey can begin only when there is a realization that all is not well, or at least when one cannot shake off some sort of simmering existential malaise.

This initial starting premise is most succinctly expressed in the sequential nature of the four Truths that became enshrined at the core of Buddhism but were a standard set of perspectives for almost all the *mokṣa* traditions.¹ Here the “path” is the fourth Truth, but it is consequent on realization of the first Truth, *sarvaṃ duḥkham*, everything is suffering, or at least unfulfilling (which is then bolstered by the other

two truths: that there is a cause for this suffering—desire—and subsequently the possibility of a state beyond suffering once the cause is removed).² The realization of being unfulfilled lies at the core of the impetus to take up practice in the *Yoga Sūtras* (II.16) and is universally associated with the quest for *mokṣa*, liberation in the soteriological traditions of ancient India. As noted previously, the fourth-to fifth-century *Sāṅkhya Kārikā* comes out and states this plainly in its very first verse; it is precisely because of being subject to unfulfillment/suffering that one seeks knowledge. Indeed, terms such as *mokṣa* and *mukti*, “liberation,” denote nothing other than liberation from suffering or frustration—and Nyāya even defines *yoga* as such (I.1.22, IV.2.46), as does the *Gītā* in VI.23.

In terms of the metaphysics of suffering common to all *yoga* schools, when consciousness identifies with its subtle and gross *prakṛtic* coverings of mind and body due to *māyā/avidyā* (illusion/ignorance), and consequently sets out to seek happiness through the mind and senses by attempting to fulfill desires associated with these coverings, it experiences frustration, *duḥkha*, instead. This is due to the temporary and ephemeral nature of *prakṛtic* enjoyment and the vulnerability of the body and mind to various mental and physical disturbances, especially disease, old age, and death. It is also due to the fact that, for the Vedic-affiliated³ schools, the body and mind are not the true self, *ātman*, but inert material coverings.⁴ Desires gratify only these external coverings, leaving the innermost self neglected. Moreover, desires are never satiated but demand ever more or morph into some other form. And all actions initiated from a place of ignorance and desire plant seeds, good or bad—the law of *karma*—and these produce reactions. Since one cannot accommodate these reactions in one lifetime—and even if one did, one would simply re-react to them anew, planting a whole new generation of seeds with ever self-multiplying consequences—one must constantly return to receive one’s fruits. And this, of course, simply feeds the self-perpetuating process in a never-ending cycle of action, reaction, re-reaction, and so on. *Samsāra* is nothing other than this.

This overall pessimistic view of the quest for material enjoyment is broadly accepted by most Indic soteriological traditions, and the tales in part 2 will reinforce for the reader unfamiliar with Indic thought these basic presuppositions shared by the *bhakti* paths with the *jñāna* (knowledge), *karma* (unmotivated duty), *dhyāna* (meditation), and other *yoga* traditions of ancient India.⁵ For Jīva, the pursuit of *yoga* practice culminates in direct experience of (what for now we will call) “the Absolute,” as is typical of the *yoga* traditions, and it is only by dint of such direct experience that ignorance, desire, and their consequent suffering is fully dispelled. Here, with difference in terminology, he upholds the assumptions of all the *yogic* schools.⁶

So, then, given this common denominator starting premise, what about other *yogas*? Is *bhakti* not just one *yoga* path among many that can lead the living entity out of this entrapment by the senses and the consequent perpetuation of *saṁsāra*? The *Bhāgavata* condenses the various paths of *yoga* into three basic categories:⁷

Three types of *yoga* have been proclaimed by Me [Kṛṣṇa] out of a desire to bestow welfare on humankind: *jñāna*, *karma*, and *bhakti*; there are no other means anywhere. *Jñāna* is for those people who have become disgusted by actions in this world that are motivated out of personal desire (*karma*), and who have renounced them; *karma yoga* is for those who have desires, and have not yet become disgusted with actions associated with these; and, for that person in whom, by good fortune, faith in the narratives, etc., about Me has arisen, *bhakti yoga* bestows perfection. (XI.20.6–8) However, as we will see, the *Bhāgavata* promotes *bhakti* as the highest path for everyone, not one among three. First of all (but less important), as is explicit in the *Gītā* (XII.1–6) and hinted at in the *Yoga Sūtras* (II.45), the *Bhāgavata* ubiquitously promotes *bhakti* as the easiest and most expedient *yoga* process. This is for the simple reason that here, as in the *Gītā*, the *ātman*’s veil of ignorance is a power (*māyā-śakti*) of Kṛṣṇa and hence can be removed only by His grace: “This

divine *māyā* composed of the three *guṇas*, is Mine and is very hard to surpass, but one who surrenders to Me can cross over it” (*Gītā* VII.4). Because of grace, then, the path of *bhakti* is deemed easy, where other paths are fraught with difficulties (*Gītā* XII.1–6). The *Bhāgavata* too presents Uddhava soliciting “an easy method by which a person can quickly attain perfection, O lotus-eyed Kṛṣṇa, as usually, when trying to control the mind, *yogīs* become exhausted in restraining it, and despondent when they cannot retain concentration” (XI.29.1–2). When exhausted by efforts based on one’s own *yogic* prowess in the attempt to still the mind, “one should worship *Īśvara* joyfully ... as it is by this means that the cause of *saṁsāra*, the cycle of birth and death, ceases” (II.2.6). So as to transcend suffering and attain liberation, the *yogī* turns to *Īśvara*, given that *māyā*, the source of suffering, is *Īśvara*’s power, so it is only *Īśvara* who can effortlessly remove it.

But, more important than this—which, in essence, is nothing other than a practical consideration of ease—there is a more profound hierarchical issue at stake. For *Jīva*, the cause of suffering is not just ignorance of one’s *ātman*, but, more fundamentally still, ignorance of, or aversion to, a higher Supreme *Ātman* (*Paramātmā*), *Īśvara*, God. This leads to the second reason *bhakti* differs from other *yogas*: the much more significant difference for the *Bhāgavata* is not ultimately just a prosaic matter of ease between *yoga* systems, but one of metaphysical hierarchy. There are different transcendent levels to the Ultimate Truth. The *ātman* may be the ultimate essence of an individual beyond the categories of body and mind, but *Īśvara* is a still higher Truth beyond the *ātman*. Realizing this, the *bhakta* redirects consciousness to *Īśvara*, rather than striving to direct it to its own inherent nature of objectless consciousness. This, in essence, is *bhakti yoga*. While some can indeed attain the *ātman* (also known as *puruṣa*) through *yogic* virtuosity and meditational prowess based on personal willpower, the attainment of *Īśvara*, a higher and Supreme *Ātman*, and entrance into *Īśvara*’s divine transcendent realm of *Vaikuṇṭha*, the personal abode of Viṣṇu, the

Kingdom of God, is attainable only (but easily) by *bhakti*: Those whose minds have become purified by the performance of mature *bhakti* by drinking the nectar of narrations about You, O Lord, attain knowledge, the essence of renunciation, and easily attain the divine realm of Vaikuṇṭha. Others, those who fix their minds ... by the power of their *yoga-samādhi*, enter into You [in Your partial manifestation] as the *puruṣa*. But theirs is hard work, unlike through the path of service [that is, *bhakti*]. (III.5.45–46; see also IV.22.40) So in addition to the “hard work” involved, the destination differs: other processes, for Jīva, such as the *jñāna* path of realizing the truths of scripture; *aṣṭāṅga yoga*, the path of stilling the mind; Sāṅkhya, the path of metaphysical analysis; and *karma yoga*, the path of selfless duty, can all awaken detachment and lead one to the *ātman/Brahman* aspect of the Absolute.⁸ From the perspective of the *Bhāgavata*, these other traditions provide exactly what they claim to provide: direct experience of the *ātman* beyond the *guṇas* (namely, realization of *Brahman*, the experience of pure, eternal, blissful consciousness devoid of all objects other than consciousness itself). But we will discuss in this section how the *ātman* aspect of the self, while transcendent, is not the ultimate expression of the Absolute Truth in the *Bhāgavata*, but only a part of it. As will become increasingly evident as we proceed, and as with the theistic readings of the *Gītā*,⁹ the *Bhāgavata* considers *Īśvara*, the Supreme *Ātman*, to be the highest aspect of *Brahman*. *Īśvara* is distinct, transcendent to, and eternally related as supreme cause to His reflections as the myriad individual *ātmans*. The individual *ātman* is only a part of, but not the entirety of, the Absolute. So *bhakti* is different from other *yogas* hierarchically in *Bhāgavata* theology; it leads to the highest and most complete level of Truth—God, the unlimited, eternal Supreme Being—where other *yogas* reveal only the individual *ātman*, which is a partial and limited expression of Truth (even as it can attain a state of infinity and eternality). In fact, if *yoga* or any spiritual practice does not lead to *Īśvara*, then it has very little ultimate value for the *Bhāgavata*.¹⁰ Jīva defines *bhakti yoga* in general as this basic refocusing of consciousness toward *Īśvara*. To understand

Bhāgavata bhakti, therefore, we must first understand something more deeply about *Īśvara*.

Let us first briefly recall once more what we have called the “grammar” of *bhakti*. *Bhakti* itself as practice—linguistically a type of action noun—requires a subject or agent of the action—the *bhakta* who performs *bhakti*—and an object or recipient of the action—an *Īśvara*, Supreme Being, who receives the action of *bhakti*. Now, having discussed the former two ingredients, *bhakti* and the *bhakta*, in this section we will devote some focused attention to some of the principal ways *Īśvara* is construed in the various expressions of *bhakti*. This section will be unavoidably more philosophically dense than the previous sections and thus more challenging for the nonspecialist. Hence, while Jīva places it first in his work, we have placed it last in the hope that those not familiar with Indian thought will have developed some confidence by this point. But we do need to put some metaphysical building blocks in place in order to discuss the status of *Īśvara* as the object of *bhakti*, which are indispensable for anyone interested in understanding how the *Bhāgavata* understands God, *Īśvara*, the receiver of *bhakti*, in contrast with the philosophical context of other important *Īśvara* or theistic traditions of India. We will need to deal with sectarian differences here. After all, if we are called upon to devote our lives to *bhakti*, and if *bhakti* involves complete devotion to *Īśvara* (which almost always takes place in a sect-specific context), some attention needs to be directed to the philosophical discussions pertaining to the ontological position of *Īśvara* among the different schools even as this discussion will require a little more intellectual rigor and philosophical detail.

Let us begin with a brief definition of terms, which will serve as an initial semantic base whose modalities can then expand as the discussion continues. We will need to nuance the term *Īśvara* vis-à-vis the term *Brahman*, which is the prominent term referring to the Absolute Truth in the Upaniṣads and derivative Vedānta traditions. We will also contrast it with the term *Bhagavān*, which appears in the titles of both the *Bhagavad*

Gitā and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Such issues will occupy us next, and we beg the indulgence of the reader unfamiliar with classical Indian thought, even as we will make every endeavor to present the material accessibly while attempting to maintain the integrity of the intellectual sophistication and subtleties of Vedānta thought. We also trust the reader more familiar with Indic philosophical categories will forgive some purposeful repetition of concepts here, adopted for those unfamiliar with the Indian metaphysical traditions in mind (and such specialists will know well that the *mokṣa* texts themselves can be very repetitive owing to their oral nature precisely with such pedagogical purposes in mind).

Definition of *Īśvara*, *Bhagavān*, and *Brahman*

The *Īśvara* (that is, theistic) element in Indic thought stretches back at least to the late Vedic period, circa 1000 B.C.E.¹¹ After the emergence of the philosophical traditions, *Īśvara* (feminine, *Īśvarī*) becomes the term preferred in philosophical discourse concerning the existence (or not) of a creator God—somewhat generically conceived (akin to the God of natural theology). As noted previously, ontology is the branch of philosophy that deals with the basic and ultimate categories of reality and their relations—such as, in our case, God, the souls, and the world of matter. So in partial contrast to the term *Bhagavān*, *Īśvara* is often associated more with an ontological or metaphysical category when the term occurs in philosophical contexts rather than with specific and personal Supreme Beings with qualities, such as Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Kṛṣṇa, who all lay claim to the title *Īśvara* in Purāṇic and epic texts. So there were *Īśvara-vāda* (theistic) traditions, which defended the philosophical necessity of a creator God—most of the Vedic-derived traditions (Yoga, Vedānta, Nyāya, Purāṇa, *Itihāsa*, and most Sāṅkhya strains) and *nir-Īśvara-vāda* (nontheistic) traditions, which challenged the philosophical coherence of theistic arguments (Jainism, Buddhism, the Cārvāka materialists, and, from the Vedic traditions, Mīmāṃsā and [debatably] some Sāṅkhya strains¹²). Whether *Īśvara-vāda* or *nir-Īśvara-vāda*,

everyone understood the term *Īśvara* to refer to the existence of some type of a Supreme Creator Being (variously construed) and hence raised reason-based arguments for or against the inferential necessity of such a postulate from the point of view of philosophical discourse and debate (*anumāna*).

Now, while this is by no means hard and fast, where the term *Īśvara* often refers to the ontological category of God as first Cause, prime Mover, Creator, Overseer, and so forth, as can be sensed from its etymology (from the root *īś*, to have extraordinary power and sovereignty), the term *Bhagavān* tends to be used when the personal form and qualities of *Īśvara* are referenced. Put simply and simplistically, *Īśvara* would be the term used in more philosophical environments and *Bhagavān* among the faithful, so to speak, in which milieus *Īśvara*, as an accepted entity, would usually be associated with the specifics of a divine form and personality. These more personal and quality-related associations inherent in the title *Bhagavān* can be sensed from the definition of the term in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* as the being who possesses the six qualities of knowledge, beauty, renunciation, majesty, potency, and fame in complete fullness (VI.5.73–75¹³). All theistic traditions accept that *Īśvara* can adopt unlimited forms and exhibit multifarious qualities—Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Rāma, and various Goddess forms being the most commonly encountered—so the terms *Bhagavān* (and feminine *Bhagavatī*) surface most commonly when referring to these specific manifestations, each with unique and wonderful characteristics. A very clumsy parallel to these two terms might be the usage of the title “king,” which is a functional or political category, as opposed to the actual person sitting on the throne, with a unique name, form, and set of qualities, even as the two coincide as the same entity. *Īśvara* and *Bhagavān* are synonymous terms, then, referring to God the Supreme Being—the Purāṇic equivalent of Jehovah, Yahweh, Allah, and the like—but while this is by no means hard and fast, the choice of term may, depending on context, invoke these different valences. The special association of the term *Bhagavān* with the specific manifestation of Kṛṣṇa

is evident in the titles of texts featuring Him—the *Bhagavad Gītā* and of course the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* itself¹⁴—but it is used abundantly for Śiva (for example, IV.29.42), Viṣṇu, and other manifestations of *Īśvara*.¹⁵

The term *Brahman*, by the time of the Upaniṣads,¹⁶ signifies the Ultimate Truth underlying all reality. It is with this term that things get technical and rather more complicated. While *Brahman* is often described as beyond descriptive categories and conceptuality,¹⁷ the qualities typically associated with it are *sat*, literally “being”;¹⁸ *cit*, consciousness; and *ānanda*, bliss.¹⁹ Now in some places in the Upaniṣads, this Truth is depicted in nonpersonal terms as a qualityless and formless but conscious infinite omnipresence²⁰—whereas in other places it is depicted in personal terms—as a thinking, willing individual who is the Supreme Creator God.²¹ Thus the simple term *Brahman* can refer to either an impersonal/nonpersonal Supreme Truth or a personal Supreme Truth, depending on different Upaniṣads (or, indeed, sections within an Upaniṣad)²² and, thereafter, on the partialities of the later Vedānta schools derived from them. We can refer to these possibilities as monistic (nonpersonal Absolute) and monotheistic (personal Absolute), respectively, or simply impersonalism and personalism. When the term *Brahman* is used in the latter sense, referring to a Supreme Being who is the God of Creation, it becomes equated and synonymous with *Īśvara*. Thus *Brahman* and *Īśvara* can also be synonyms, especially in the monotheistic traditions such the Vaiṣṇava ones. And in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and *Bhāgavata*, all these terms—*Īśvara*, *Bhagavān*, and *Brahman*—refer to one and the same Kṛṣṇa—as they do to Śiva in the Śaivite traditions and their feminine forms to Devī in the Goddess traditions (the relationship between these divine manifestations—a Purāṇa issue—will occupy us later, once we have our semantic and ontological building blocks—a Vedānta issue—in place).

The term *ātman* is inseparably associated with the term *Brahman* and usually (but by no means always) used when referring to *Brahman* as embodied in the individual micro living entities, where the term *Brahman* is usually used where the ultimate macro source Truth

underpinning all reality is intended. The terms are often used interchangeably, however. Depending on the school (which again reflects partiality to differing Upaniṣadic references as we will discuss), *ātman* is either understood as completely identical with *Brahman*, rendering the two terms entirely synonymous, most notably with the “nonpersonal” monist schools such as *advaita Vedānta*;²³ or perceived as a differentiated part of *Brahman*, qualitatively the same insofar as it comprises pure consciousness but nonetheless quantitatively a vastly lesser part or individualized portion of *Brahman* and an eternally distinct part. This latter view is the defining feature of Vaiṣṇavism, the cluster of “personalist,” monotheistic schools, such as that of the Vedānta of the twelfth-century theologian Rāmānuja, whom we will quote frequently, the theological forerunner to Jīva’s own school.²⁴

As a point of interest, the Krishnamacarya-derived yoga lineages that have spread the practice of *āsana* and basic *yoga* philosophy so widely in the West have their Vedānta roots in Rāmānuja’s Vedānta tradition, the philosophical name for which is *viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta*. Krishnamacarya was a staunch adherent of this tradition, and his son Desikachar as well as his son-in-law Iyengar maintained their identity with it, even though very few students of these teachers have any awareness of this aspect of their *guru*’s philosophical and spiritual identity, as it was not stressed by them.²⁵ The other great teacher associated through his disciples with the general spread of *yoga* in the West, Swami Śivānanda, was, in contrast, an adherent of *advaita*. This focus is clearly evident not only in his own writings, but in the teachings of his students Vishnudevananda and Satcitananda (there are, of course, always exceptions to such categorizations: Krishnamacarya’s disciple Pattabhi Jois, for example, was a follower of *advaita*).

In any event, for our present purposes, since *Brahman* can take either these personal or nonpersonal semantic inflections, where *Īśvara* is less ambiguous, as it is the term usually used when one specifically wishes to refer to the personal, individual, or, at least, distinct expression of *Brahman* as Creator Deity, *Īśvara* is the term I have primarily used here

for God as the recipient of *bhakti*. The term is especially useful when one wishes to underscore the more generic trans-sectarian aspects of *bhakti* that would be recognized by other *Īśvara* traditions such as Śaivism, as opposed to Kṛṣṇa-specific expressions. We have also used the term *Bhagavān* in the same manner, as it is essentially synonymous with *Īśvara*, albeit with heightened personal inflections. The personal Being Kṛṣṇa, as we know, is synonymous with all three of these terms: *Īśvara*, *Bhagavān*, and *Brahman* (as are Śiva and Devī in their respective *bhakti* traditions). Having said all this, the reader must be prepared to encounter slippage and interchangeability among some of these terms but should soon develop an intuitive sense of contextual nuances.

Returning to the role of *Īśvara* as recipient of *bhakti* in Jīva's system, there are a few important questions that need to be addressed if Jīva's analysis of *bhakti* is to be considered systematic and rational rather than dogmatic. The first is the existence or necessity of any sort of *Īśvara* as Creator God in the first place. Second, if this can be established, or at least defended on rational grounds, what is the precise relationship between the personal aspect of *Brahman* as *Īśvara/Bhagavān*, a Being distinctive by form and qualities, and the nonpersonal expression of *Brahman*, devoid of form and qualities? And third, given that in Hindu *bhakti*, *Īśvara*, being unlimited, can and does adopt unlimited forms, and given that Hindu *bhakti* is not polytheistic, what is the justification for the *Bhāgavata*'s prioritization of Kṛṣṇa as the ultimate causal *Īśvara*—the source of all other *Īśvara* forms and manifestations—as opposed to other claimants to this position, most specifically Śiva or Viṣṇu? We stress here, on this latter score, that the question is not who is the one true *Īśvara* with the implication that other claimants are somehow “false gods,” but who is the *source* *Īśvara* from whom other *Īśvara* forms emanate or are derived? In other words, given that all Vedānta schools whether monist or monotheist accept a plethora of *Īśvara* forms on some level, whether these are primary expressions of *Brahman* or secondary expressions (we will explain this below), then what is the ontological relationship between all these eternal *Īśvaras*? Hence, although technical,

this section is indispensable in gaining a sense of the various ways *bhakti yoga* can be understood and practiced, given that *bhakti* requires an *Īśvara*, howsoever construed, as recipient.

With regard to the first issue raised above, the necessity of positing a creator *Īśvara* in the first place, the history of Indian theistic (and antitheistic) argumentation—frankly as vigorous and inconclusive an intellectual enterprise in ancient India as it has been in the West—understandably takes us far beyond our focus here. We will simply note that Jīva is heir to much of this history, which had long been fine-tuned by predecessor Vedāntins (followers of Vedānta), who defended the theism of the Upaniṣads,²⁶ prioritizing hermeneutics (scriptural analysis)²⁷ as method, as well as by Nyāya, the school of logicians, who defended theism on rational grounds, prioritizing inference (*anumāna*).²⁸ (As a point of interest, Caitanya, the founder of Jīva’s lineage, prior to becoming an ecstatic mystic, is said to have been an outstanding teacher of Nyāya in Navadvīpa, the stronghold of the new school of Nyāya that reached its peak in the sixteenth century, when and where he was born.²⁹) As is the case in the West, some of the most brilliant intellectual minds of ancient India had used reason and logic in defense of the necessity of an *Īśvara* as the ultimate intelligent cause of reality, on the one hand, and in a refutation of any such postulate on the other. But by the sixteenth century, various forms of theisms had long dominated the intellectual traditions of the subcontinent, and Jīva inherits theistic currents that had been built on long-established philosophical rationales and argumentation (see “The Object of *Bhakti*,” note 71, for an example of these).

Nonetheless, with regard to these theistic traditions, we made the claim in the introduction that understanding one expression of *bhakti* provides us with a template, which can usefully be applied to other expressions. This is especially true for many of the practices of *bhakti*, as well as some of the psychological states it engenders, but much less true philosophically, in terms of the ontology of theism, that is, *Īśvara*’s relationship with the ultimate ingredients of reality. There are important

and fundamental differences as to whether the Being *Īśvara* is the ultimate causal entity in terms of tracing all effects in reality back to their ultimate causes—the cause of all other causes or final “STOP sign,” so to speak—or whether *Īśvara* is a partially Supreme and causal Entity but one who, in turn, is Himself also derived from some higher, nonpersonal, even more ultimate causal Absolute and hence not the final “STOP sign.”

So despite the many commonalities in the various *bhakti* traditions, there are significant differences in the ultimacy assigned to *Īśvara*. To be absolutely clear about how we are using our terms, and connecting all this with the term *Brahman*, is *Īśvara*, who as the object of *bhakti* is a distinct supreme sort of personalized *ātman*,³⁰ the primary and final expression of *Brahman*,³¹ or is *Īśvara* a secondary truth who is himself derivative of a higher nonpersonal source, which also lays claim to the term *Brahman* and thus also something that is eventually transcended? And, for that matter, what kind of ultimacy is assigned to the individual *ātman* as *bhakta*—is this individuality also ultimate and eternal or merely an illusory condition of embodiment in *saṁsāra* that dissolves in liberation? These issues have occupied the Vedānta traditions stemming from the ancient Upaniṣads for well over two millennia, with no consensus—Bādarāyaṇa’s *Vedānta Sūtras* of the second century C.E. makes reference to differences among predecessor Vedāntins throughout.³²

These concerns are not merely intellectualism: let us consider the devotional implications of these positions. If the individuality of the *ātman* is eternal, and *Īśvara* is also an eternal Supreme Being and Ultimate Truth, then the relationship between them—*bhakti*—can also be eternal. This would require an eternal trans-*prakṛti* *Brahman* realm or dimension wherein this relationship can take place and modalities whereby *bhakti* between the *ātman* and *Īśvara* can be expressed—a “Kingdom of God,” such as, in Jiva’s case, Vaikuṇṭha or Goloka replete with the *rāgātmika* liberated souls. If, on the other hand, the individuality of the *ātman* is contingent on embodiment and ultimately dissolves in liberation, and if the personal *Īśvara* too is ultimately

derived from a higher nonpersonal *Brahman* Truth—a lesser manifestation or representation of some more Ultimate Truth—then *bhakti* is not eternal, but merely a temporal practice relevant in *saṁsāra* only as a method for freeing oneself from the ephemeral world of *prakṛti*. It is thus jettisoned upon liberation, a state of transpersonal, formless, and qualityless oneness, where there is no individuality and thus no ontological space for devotional relationships. So the issue deals with not only ultimate categories of reality, but the ultimate status of *bhakti*, and it is certainly relevant to the eternal destiny of the *ātman* and, thus, of considerable import.

Perhaps we can now understand more clearly, given all this, why different schools are going to assign great value and attention to deliberations and debates on these most important of issues and why we must perforce encounter the sectarian nature of the Vedānta or Purāṇa traditions in order to understand some of the various possible modalities of *bhakti* and some of the different ways in which *Īśvara* is conceived in Hinduism. And all this requires technical attention and a modicum of philosophical rigor.

Prakṛti and the Three Guṇas: Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas

Before we proceed with this, since we are setting out ubiquitously occurring terms and concepts here, let us interrupt our flow for a moment and take the opportunity to briefly discuss the metaphysics of *prakṛti*, the world of matter, the third entity in the triad of *Īśvara*, *ātman*, and the created world. In fact, this is not unrelated to our overall concerns at this point, as *Īśvara* is commonly conceived in the theistic traditions as the creator of the material world of *prakṛti* (physical reality)³³ and *bhakti* as nothing other than the offering of ingredients of *prakṛti* (including one's *prakṛtic* body and mind) to *Īśvara*. With regard to the essential makeup of *prakṛti*, the *Bhāgavata* accepts the overall schema of the metaphysics of the Sāṅkhya (literally “numeration”) system,³⁴ although it subsumes the evolutes of *prakṛti* as completely subordinate to and derived from *Īśvara*. But bracketing the position of *Īśvara* for a

moment, in Sāṅkhya metaphysics, the universe of animate and inanimate entities is perceived as ultimately the product of two ontologically distinct entities coming together. These two entities are *prakṛti*, or the primordial unconscious material matrix of the physical universe,³⁵ and *puruṣa*, a term synonymous with *ātman*, the innumerable conscious souls or selves embedded within it.

As a result of the interaction between these two entities, the material universe evolves in a series of stages. The actual catalysts in this evolutionary process are the three *guṇas*, literally “strands” or “qualities,” which are inherent in *prakṛti*. While it is impossible to translate these terms into a one-word English equivalent, three prominent qualities associated with each of these, respectively, are *sattva*, “tranquillity”; *rajas*, “action”; and *tamas*, “inertia.”³⁶ These *guṇas* are sometimes compared with the threads that underpin the existence of a rope; just as a rope is actually a combination of threads, so all manifest reality actually consists of a combination of the *guṇas*. These *guṇas* are mentioned incessantly throughout the *Bhāgavata*, as are the various evolutes from *prakṛti*, and thus require some attention in order to navigate the frequent references to them in our translations in parts 2 and 3.

Given the meditative focus of the text, the *guṇas* are especially significant to the Yoga tradition in terms of their psychological manifestations; in Yoga, since the mind and therefore all psychological/cognitive dispositions and functions are products of *prakṛti*, they are also made up of the *guṇas*—the only difference between the subtle mind and grosser matter being that the former has a larger preponderance of *sattva* and the latter of *tamas*. Therefore, according to the specific intermixture and proportionality of the *guṇas*, living beings exhibit different types of mind-sets and psychological dispositions. Thus, when *sattva* is predominant in an individual, the qualities of lucidity, tranquillity, wisdom, discrimination, detachment, peacefulness, and happiness manifest; when *rajas* is predominant, hankering, attachment, energetic endeavor, passion, power, restlessness, creative activity, and,

ultimately, frustration and unfulfillment result (the term *rāga* comes from the same root); and when *tamas*, the *guṇa* least favorable for Yoga, is predominant, sleep, ignorance, delusion, disinterest, lethargy, depression, destructive behavior, and disinclination toward constructive activity ensue.

Just as there are an unlimited variety of colors stemming from the intermixture of the three primary colors, different hues being simply expressions of the specific proportionality of red, yellow, and blue, so the unlimited psychological dispositions of living creatures (and of physical material forms) stem from the intermixture of the *guṇas*, specific states of mind being the products of the particular proportionality of the intermixture of the three *guṇas*. The *guṇas* are continually interacting and competing with one another, one *guṇa* becoming prominent for a while and overpowering the others, only to be dominated in turn by the increase of one of the other *guṇas* (*Gītā* XIV.10). The Sāṅkhya text, the *Yuktidīpikā*, compares them with the wick, fire, and oil of the lamp, which, while opposed to one another in their nature, come together to produce light (13). Clearly, *sattva* is the *guṇa* most favorable to Yoga in general, and one for which there is no excess, where the other two, in excess, are obstacles (even as some degree of *rajas* and *tamas* is indispensable for embodied existence³⁷). Much yoga practice in general, then, occupies itself with maximizing *sattva*.

Not only do the *guṇas* underpin the philosophy of mind in Yoga, but the activation and interaction of these *guṇa* qualities result in the production of the entirety of physical forms that also evolve from the primordial material matrix, *prakṛti*, under the same principle.³⁸ Thus the physical compositions of objects such as air, fire, water, stone, and so on differ because of the differing constitutional makeup of specific *guṇas* underpinning these elements: air contains more of the buoyancy of *sattva*, stones more of the denseness of the *tamas* element, and fire more of the energy of *rajas*. The *guṇas* allow for the infinite plasticity of *prakṛti* and the objects of the world. The process by which the universe evolves

from *prakṛti* is usefully compared with the churning of milk: when milk receives a citric catalyst, yogurt, curds, or butter emerge. These immediate products, in turn, can be further manipulated to produce a tertiary series of products—toffee, milk desserts, cheese, and the like.³⁹ And, again, connecting all this to our present discussion, *prakṛti* with its *guṇas* is a *śakti*, power, of *Īśvara*, and thus all these permutations are the immanent aspect of *Īśvara*, God as world (*Gītā* VII.4–7, 17).

The Nature of *Īśvara* in Vedānta: Primary or Derivative?

With these basic definitions and metaphysical infrastructure in place, we can return to our questions pertaining to the transcendent aspect of *Īśvara* as object of *bhakti* and whether this Being is the ultimate aspect of *Brahman* or not. For our purposes here, we can identify two general spheres of discussion or contention pertaining to the nature of *Īśvara* in the Vedānta and Purāṇa traditions that have spanned two millennia, both with their roots in the Vedic (Upaniṣad) texts and both revolving around issues of cause and effect. One, touched on above, pertains to whether *Īśvara* is the highest feature of *Brahman*, the Ultimate, the personal source from which everything else is manifest, or whether *Īśvara* represents a secondary aspect of *Brahman*, derived from a higher nonpersonal expression of *Brahman* beyond all forms and qualities. Put differently, the question is whether the *ultimate* causal expression of *Brahman* is personal or nonpersonal. This is primarily a Vedāntic issue. The second and subsequent discussion is, irrespective of whether *Īśvara* is primary and causal or whether secondary and derived, which specific Divine Being, *Bhagavān*, is the ultimate causal *Īśvara* from whom all other *Īśvaras* derive or, at least, are sustained? This is more a Purāṇic issue.

We note that almost all traditions stemming from these textual traditions accept that *Brahman*, if it is to be complete (and also to account for the fact that *yogic* practice and experiences attest to two primary modes of encountering the Ultimate), must have both personal and nonpersonal features: almost all followers of the Vedānta and the

Purāṇas accept some sort of *Īśvara* as well as some type of nonpersonal aspect to the Absolute.⁴⁰ So the first question is whether *Īśvara* is primary and foundational or a secondary-derived manifestation from a higher Truth, and the second question relates to the hierarchical relationship among the various *Īśvara* forms and manifestations. And it is important to reiterate with regard to the second question that the various followers of the Vedānta and the Purāṇas all accept that *Īśvara* takes many different forms, which are all *Īśvara*, so when considering which *Īśvara* is ultimate and causal to the others, there is no implication that the others are not true *Īśvaras*. Put differently, since *bhakti* is embedded in traditions that are either monistic (subscribing to a “nonpersonal” Absolute) or monotheistic (subscribing to a “personal” Absolute),⁴¹ and in both cases rejects the label of polytheism, then there cannot be a plurality of independent and autonomous *Īśvaras*, as is the case with polytheism.⁴² In polytheism, the gods—small “g,” perhaps better termed demigods (the *devas* in the Indic case, whom we have been calling “celestials”)—are more or less equal or, at best, there is a minor hierarchy among them. In Hinduism, such gods, *devas*, are retained, but they are nontranscendent but rather embodied beings, relegated to the temporal celestial spheres of *samsāra*, where they too are bound by their (exceptionally good) *karma* and hence retain their positions only temporarily. They are eternally subordinate to the various forms of *Īśvara*. So with polytheism discounted, either the various manifestations of *Īśvara* are all derivative of a higher, qualityless *Brahman* (nonpersonalism or monism), or they are all secondary manifestations from one supreme source *Īśvara* (personalism or monotheism).

On this first question, by the end of the first millennium and thereafter (but with roots in the Upaniṣad texts, *Mahābhārata* epic, and *Gītā*, dating back several centuries prior to the Common Era), the Vedānta tradition broadly split into two major streams with multiple substreams: the *advaita*, or monist tradition, and its offshoots, which consider the highest *Brahman* to be ultimately devoid of form and qualities; and the monotheist Vaiṣṇava traditions, which hold the highest

Brahman to be the eternal personal *Īśvara* who possesses unlimited forms and qualities. *Advaita* means “no duality” (and is thus more or less synonymous with the term “monism”; “a” prefixed to a noun in Sanskrit negates the noun, as in *atheist* in English). According to this Vedānta lineage, there is precisely only the one nonpersonal, formless, qualityless *Brahman*. Indeed, this tradition goes a significant step further than this—anything else is ultimately unreal. There are absolutely no dualities whatsoever in *Brahman*. So the apparently plural and individual *ātman*s are illusory, the product of ignorance; they are, in fact, nothing other than the one undivided *Brahman*.⁴³ And, more, the world of *prakṛti*, with all its forms and dualities, including the bodies that appear to individualize and differentiate the *ātman*s containing them and the minds that characterize them, are all also false: an illusion. In the language of *advaita*, they are a superimposition (*adhyāsa*) on the one undivided *Brahman*, like an image superimposed upon another in photography or, using the standard *advaita* metaphor, the notion of a snake superimposed because of defective perception upon what is actually a rope lying on the road. Thus, for *advaita*, all manifest forms (that is, all creation), although appearing apparently real, are ultimately illusory, appearing real only because of being superimposed upon the formless *Brahman* by *māyā*, illusion. They are in essence like the forms in a mirage.

For our purposes, consequent on this, if the creation is illusory, then so, ultimately, is the notion of a Creator for *advaita Vedānta*. *Īśvara* is apparently real only to the extent the world of created forms is conventionally real (*vyavahāra*), but from the perspective of the highest reality (*paramārtha*), neither the world nor *Īśvara* ultimately exists. Just as in the world of the mirage, there may appear to be an oasis with water and palm trees, but when correct perception is attained one realizes there is only desert, so the creation, along with its creatures and creator, appears real only in conventional reality, but all are dispelled when awareness of ultimate reality dawns. *Īśvara* thus also proves to be as much a part of the illusory superimposition upon *Brahman* as

anything else. In actuality, there is only the nondifferentiated (*advaita*) *Brahman*; any perceived differences or dualities are the product of *avidyā*, ignorance.

Importantly for our purposes, following on these presuppositions, the *bhakti yoga* performed by an embodied *ātman* to *Īśvara*, for *advaita Vedānta*, is useful as a preliminary aid in the pursuit of enlightenment for those still laboring under the grip of the illusion of dualities but eventually becomes discarded along with the very notion of an *Īśvara* once knowledge of the one formless nonindividualized Absolute dawns. Put succinctly, neither *bhakta*, *bhakti yoga*, nor *Īśvara* as object of *bhakti* has a factual existence in the fully enlightened, postmortem liberated state.⁴⁴ There are simply no dualities whatsoever in the Supreme reality, hence *advaita*. In sum, although the *advaita* traditions may perform with serious intent and devotional vigor all the processes of *bhakti* that we discussed previously, *bhakti* in these traditions is, at the end of the day, method, not goal.

With one important exception, the Vaiṣṇava traditions such as the *Bhāgavata* (and some Śaivite traditions) also consider themselves to be nondualists, insofar as they accept everything as an expression of the one Truth, but hold that the nonduality of the Absolute nonetheless has real differences inherent within it.⁴⁵ This is amply reflected in the name given by Rāmānuja, who was the first Vaiṣṇava theologian to write a commentary on the *Vedānta Sūtras*, to his Vedānta school: *viśiṣṭa-advaita*.⁴⁶ Here, the *advaita* signification is retained but prefixed with the term *viśiṣṭa*, “differentiated.” *Brahman* is indeed nondual, but there are “differences” inherent within it, distinct components within the oneness of *Brahman*—namely, an ontologically real world with real souls. For the Vaiṣṇavas, while *Brahman* does indeed have nonpersonal qualities and powers (*śaktis*)—such as *prakṛti* and the *guṇas*—in contrast with *advaita*, it is understood, in its highest causal expression, to be personal, *Īśvara*. This Person is Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa/Kṛṣṇa. *Īśvara* is a distinct Supreme Being, who, while an individual, is unlimited in names, forms, qualities, and deeds. Hence these traditions can be considered robustly monotheistic

(even as this Person can also manifest in other derivative *Īśvara* forms such as Śiva and Devī, as will be explained later).

The *ātmans* are manifestations of *Īśvara* and thus, as parts, are similar to their cause in their inherent makeup as eternal conscious beings. But they are distinct individual entities, even as their constitutional dependence on *Īśvara* requires that they be relationally connected with *Īśvara*. This relationality can manifest either, ideally, in a direct relationship of eternal *bhakti*, previously discussed, or, indirectly and perversely, by being subject to *Īśvara*'s power of ignorance and illusion, *māyā/avidyā*, in *saṁsāra*, embodied life. These options reflect the free will and choices of the *ātman*. And the world, like the *ātmans*, is real and emanated. Within this variegation of the one Absolute, the personal *Īśvara* is the highest expression and the support of all other aspects of reality (that is, of the world and the souls). All of these entities, in contrast with *advaita*, are inherently real; they are not false superimpositions.

Perhaps we can say that Rāmānuja's *Brahman* is "holistic"—where parts and differences exist, but in a holistic harmony—and Śaṅkara's is "homogeneous"—there are no parts.⁴⁷ Curiously, this means that, ontologically, in terms of its understanding of the basic ingredients of reality—God, world, souls, with the last distinct from but derived from the first—Vaiṣṇavism is much closer theologically to the Abrahamic monotheistic traditions, despite the geographic, cultural, and textual disparities, than the fellow Vedānta traditions of *advaita*, despite sharing the same locus, religious and cultural ethos and practices, and identical scriptural traditions with the latter. And, as an aside, these Vaiṣṇava (and some Śaivite) traditions undermine the ill-informed and culturally myopic notion that monotheism is a uniquely theological development of the Abrahamic traditions.

Therefore, in Vaiṣṇavism, the divine forms of Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu, and Śiva and their feminine consorts and counterparts—Lakṣmī and Parvatī and so on—are not illusory. They are ultimate, transcendent Beings, and it is they who are the source of all nonpersonal powers (*śaktis*) and entities

such as *prakṛti* and the *ātmans*. Moreover, since these Beings are eternal and transcendent to *prakṛti*, they occupy non-*prakṛtic* realms within *Brahman*, *Vaikuṇṭha*—the Kingdom of God, within which, for the Gauḍīya tradition, lies *Goloka*, the realm exclusive to Kṛṣṇa, and also *Śiva-loka*. Consequently—connecting all this to the theme of this volume—*bhakti* is not simply a utilitarian process relevant for those embodied in ignorance in this world: it is never discarded but can continue eternally in the postmortem liberated state in these divine realms. Now we have a more grounded philosophical basis to understand our discussion on the *rāgātmikas*: the loving exchanges and interactions and reciprocal service between Kṛṣṇa and His *bhaktas*, when He incarnated into this world as described in the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata* and featured here in part 3, serve as a window into the eternal relationships that can transpire between Kṛṣṇa and the liberated *bhaktas* in the divine realm of *Goloka*. *Bhakti*, in these traditions, is thus both method and goal.

And there are all sorts of variants. Given our focus on Kṛṣṇa, we again wish to refer, albeit summarily, to Kaśmir Śaivism, by way of an example of non-Vaiṣṇava theism. We can now situate it as occupying an interesting location somewhere between these two Vedānta streams. We should note that Vedānta, whether monist or monotheist, has been primarily a Vaiṣṇava enterprise. But although Śaiva philosophy has not been included in most of the official doxographies (compilations of philosophical schools),⁴⁸ the notion of the “six schools of Indian philosophy” that eventually becomes reified as standard is something of an artificiality.⁴⁹ For whatever reason, the Śākta/Tantra/Siddha cluster of traditions did not make it into the final list, but these are intellectually rich and metaphysically sophisticated traditions, with very ancient roots,⁵⁰ so their exclusion has likely a lot more to do with the partialities and influence of elitist caste-sensitive scholastic traditions than a lack of philosophical coherence and theological vigor on the part of the Śaiva/Śākta traditions.

In any event, Kaśmir Śaivism is monistic, insofar as the ultimate

highest Truth (*parama-Śiva*) is transpersonal and the individuality of the *ātman* is illusory. But this tradition does hold the world to be real and not illusory, as also the personal form of Śiva, and strongly rebuts *advaita Vedānta* on that score. All form and individualism are products of *śakti*, vibrational creative consciousness, real but emanating from an ultimate higher nonpersonal expression of Śiva. So these traditions are monistic, but this is not the extreme monism of *advaita Vedānta*. Nonetheless, here too *bhakti*, while usually performed in a much more robust manner than in *advaita* given that the person Śiva, while secondary to a higher impersonal Absolute, is decidedly real and not illusory, is still ultimately made redundant when one realizes one's oneness with the ultimate Supreme aspect of formless Śiva.⁵¹

This type of qualified monism of Kaśmir Śaivism is in contrast with another Śaiva tradition, the dualist Śaiva Siddhānta, where *bhakti* constitutes the eternal relationship between Śiva and the *ātman*, two individuals united in the oneness of love. The *ātman* does not merge into Śiva and lose its individuality in this tradition. Therefore, as we have noted, Śaiva Siddhānta is thus closer to Vaiṣṇavism on the Vedānta spectrum, as it upholds an eternal distinction between Śiva and His devoted *ātmans*, even as the focus on the forms, qualities, and deeds of *Īśvara* and His *bhaktas* in the liberated state are less evident in Śaiva Siddhānta, if at all.

Let us consider a spectrum between radical nonpersonalism, a *Brahman* completely devoid of all qualities and forms as represented by *advaita* on the one hand,⁵² and, on the other, Jīva's Gauḍīya Vedānta tradition, with its full-blown personalism, the ultimate expression of which is Kṛṣṇa and his *rāgātmika bhaktas* in Goloka, a realm of pure consciousness bursting with transcendent forms and qualities. Kaśmir Śaivism might be located somewhere in the center of this spectrum, and Śaiva Siddhānta center right, veering slightly more toward Jīva's modality. Rāmānuja's *viśiṣṭādvaita* school is very close to Jīva's, along with that of the twelfth-century theologian Madhva. These schools are both sister (or perhaps more accurately parent) traditions to Jīva's

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, except that in Rāmānuja and Madhva’s tradition, Kṛṣṇa is an incarnation of Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa, assumed only when the latter wishes to incarnate into the world and not vice versa.⁵³ It is Viṣṇu and His divine realm of Vaikuṇṭha that are ultimate here.

While, as we have seen, Jīva and Rūpa take great pains to substantiate their understanding of *bhakti* with quotes from the *Bhāgavata*, the notion of Goloka with its *rāgātmikā* modes of love of God is, to all intents and purposes, a new “revelation” imparted by Caitanya to his disciples, who in turn “theologize” it systematically through a massive output of devotional literature in the sixteenth century, as discussed in the introduction. The philosophical name of the Caitanya (Gauḍīya) school is *acintya-bheda-abheda* (inconceivably one and different), *acintya-bheda-abheda* points to the position that the world and the souls are one with Kṛṣṇa (*abheda*) but also different (*bheda*). This relationship is inconceivable (*acintya*) and beyond the capability of human intelligence to comprehend (however, Jīva invests as much philosophical energy as any other Vedāntin in arguing why this must be so). All this is very similar to Rāmānuja’s *viśiṣṭādvaita* (qualified nondualism) tradition—differing in terms of its metaphysical basics on technical details of interest only to scholastics. There is no doubt that the Gauḍīya tradition rests its theological superstructure on the substructural foundations established by Rāmānuja, along with the later twelfth-century theistic Vedāntin Madhva, two highly revered predecessors of the tradition.

Madhva, briefly introduced (as the Gauḍīya tradition formally situates itself within this lineage),⁵⁴ established a radical dualist school in explicit oppositional contrast with Śaṅkara’s *advaita*. Indeed, his school is polemically called *dvaita* (dualist)⁵⁵ *Vedānta*. A powerful and provocative philosopher,⁵⁶ Madhva argued that there are five eternal fundamental differences among the ultimate “reals,”⁵⁷ or ingredients of reality (we use the term “reals,” as Madhva vigorously opposes Śaṅkara’s illusionism pertaining to the unreality of *prakṛti* and the individuality of the *ātman*).⁵⁸ There are eternal differences between Viṣṇu and the world, between Him and the souls, among individual souls themselves, and

among the atoms of the world. For our purposes, Madhva differs marginally from the other Vaiṣṇava traditions in that, given the above metaphysics, he deems the world and souls not to emanate from God, but to be eternal coexistents, even as the former requires Viṣṇu as their support, instigator, and enabler in all things. There are other Vaiṣṇava lineages in addition to the ones we have touched upon.⁵⁹

Such fundamental disagreements over the metaphysical location and status of *Īśvara* have been central to Vedānta since certainly the time of Śaṅkara, whose *advaita* commentaries on the Vedānta texts in the eighth to the ninth century made him a figurehead of that tradition. But these issues are referenced throughout the *Vedānta Sūtras* of the second century C.E. and ultimately have their genesis in the Upaniṣads spanning much of the first millennium B.C.E. The roots of the problem, if we can call it such, originate in the fact that the Upaniṣads appear to make conflicting statements. In some places, these texts suggest that the highest *Brahman* is a personal being (for example, see *Śvetāśvatara* III.1ff.), in others that it is nonpersonal (for instance, in *Kena* I.4–5). Likewise, some places imply that the *ātman* and *Brahman* are nondifferent (as in *Chāndogya* VI.8.7ff.), others that they are nondifferent insofar as they are *Brahman* yet simultaneously still separate as individuals and hierarchically distinct (such as in *Chāndogya* VI.2.3; *Śvetāśvatāra* I.6–10). And, again, there are references that can be read to suggest the world is unreal (see *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* IV.4.9), and others that it is real (*Chāndogya* VI.3.2). The debates among the modern representatives of these lineages on such issues continue to the present day and are, indeed, part of the traditional training in the schools. Such debates mostly prioritize and revolve around scriptural exegesis but also engage reason and argument in substantial ways.

For text-critical academic scholars such differences are natural, reflecting the composition of the Upaniṣads over the course of several centuries and thus of different thinkers expressing distinct views that are diachronically as well as synchronically various. An orthodox Vedānta thinker, however, does not perceive the Upaniṣads either as

chronologically evolving or as synchronically authored by different humans: as discussed in appendix 1, they are considered *Śruti*, eternal divine revelation not composed by humans (*apauruṣeya*).⁶⁰ Consequently, from a traditional perspective, as transcendent scripture, they cannot be contradictory or imperfect in any way, but are a priori consistent (*Vedānta Sūtras* 1.4). Since the vagaries of human historical context and composition are not an option, then any supposed internal contradictions can only be apparently so but in fact must stem from an imperfect understanding or reading of these texts. That being the case, an interpretative lens is required—one that will organize the apparently contradictory or inconsistent statements into meaningful harmony. Hermeneutics refers to the methods applied in scriptural interpretation, and a good deal of traditional Vedānta hermeneutics is nothing other than applying such a lens. In fact, it is with the intention of systematizing the Upaniṣadic statements into a cohesive set of teachings⁶¹ that the *Vedānta Sūtras* (also known as the *Uttara Mīmāṃsā* or *Brahma Sūtras*) was written in the first place and its authorship assigned to our sage Vyāsa (Bādarāyaṇa), whom we will encounter in the tales.

This, however, did not exactly solve the problem, as the *Vedānta Sūtras* are so minimalist in content, frugal in explanatory detail, and cryptic in meaning⁶² that they are incomprehensible in their own right without commentaries. They too require clarification. This leads to the requirement of a third tier or layer of what has come to constitute the Vedānta corpus: the commentaries (*bhāṣya*), but now on both the Upaniṣads themselves as well as the Sūtras that were ostensibly written to clarify them. These commentaries, however, further compounded the problem rather than resolving it, but for different reasons. Although, unlike the previous two *Vedānta* strata, the commentaries are extensive, clear, internally consistent, and comprehensible, the new dilemma they introduce is that the interpretative lenses the different schools adopt to clarify the Upaniṣads produce explanations that differ radically from each other on the most fundamental of ontological issues. Put more precisely, what we might call the Vaiṣṇava-associated lineages differ

significantly from the *advaita Vedānta*–derived ones,⁶³ along the lines we have touched upon above.

After all, broadly and simplistically put, much human intellectual endeavor, irrespective of time or place, or whether philosophical, religious, or scientific, is directed toward attempting to understand the nature of the physical world, the nature of life and the living entities within it, and the nature of its cause. Put into Vedānta categories: Is the ultimate cause, *Brahman*, personal or nonpersonal? Is the living entity, *ātman*, unequivocally nondifferent from *Brahman*, or is it individualized and thus distinct in some way? And is the physical world, *prakṛti*, real and actual, or is it an illusory, false superimposition? These are the most basic, essential, primordial, and universal of intellectual issues, yet ones over which the *Vedānta* lineages differ about as radically as it is possible to differ.

Thus, for example, Śaṅkara (following a Buddhist schema⁶⁴) creates harmony from the apparently conflicting statements of the Upaniṣads by organizing them into a two-tiered hierarchy. From this *advaita* perspective, when the Vedānta texts⁶⁵ speak of the *ātman* as individual, *Brahman* as personal (*Īśvara/Bhagavān*), and the world as real, they are speaking from the perspective of *vyavahārika*, lower conventional reality. As we know, conventional reality in *advaita* is ultimately false and illusory. On the other hand, the statements indicating *Brahman* to be nonpersonal and nondual, the individualism of the *ātman* illusory, and the world false, are speaking from the perspective of *paramārthika*, higher absolute reality, and thus ultimately true. He can thus accept all the statements in the Vedānta texts as absolute and true (as he is bound to do as an orthodox Vedāntin) by relegating conflicting statements to one or other of his two hierarchical strata, lower and higher.

For Rāmānuja, in stark contrast, the vigorous opponent of Śaṅkara, when the texts speak of *Brahman* as nondual, they intend that everything emanates from the *Brahman* and is thus of one essence. But this does not preclude differences within the oneness (that is, the *viśiṣṭa*, “differentiation,” within the *advaita*), and thus the oneness is rather a

“holistic” than an absolute, nondifferentiated oneness. Likewise with the individual *ātman*: it may be nondual from *Brahman*, as part to whole, but this does not negate its individuality. Along the same lines, when *Brahman* is spoken of as without qualities, this points to a lack of *prakṛtic* qualities of the three *guṇas*: it does not preclude divine (*Brahman*) qualities and forms.⁶⁶ When described as impersonal, *Brahman*’s all-pervasive energies (*śaktis*) are intended (like the light vis-à-vis the sun), and when depicted as personal, *Brahman*’s ultimate feature as Viṣṇu is signified. And the unreality of the world points to its temporality, not its illusionality. Thus, Rāmānuja’s interpretative lens also allows him to accept all the apparently conflicting textual statements to be absolute and true. But rather than resolving this through a two-tiered hierarchical model like Śaṅkara—conventional (lower) and ultimate (higher)—he relegates them to different modalities of *Brahman*: some statements refer to *Brahman* as *Īśvara*, some to *Brahman* as the world, and some to *Brahman* as the individual *ātman* in *saṃsāra*.

So the interpretative lenses the traditions apply to harmonize the apparently conflicting statements of the Upaniṣads work well in terms of appearing convincing for those who already subscribe to that lineage (that is, using the language of Yoga psychology, those whose *saṃskāras* have been trained to align with that viewpoint). And certainly an extensive and impressive amount of hermeneutical energy is invested in them. But the fact is, other equally carefully crafted lenses can be, and obviously have been, formulated with their own harmonizing persuasiveness. At the end of the day, the relative merit of these interpretative lenses ends up being evaluated along sectarian lines.

So, in summary, because the Upaniṣads appear contradictory and unsystematic, the *Vedānta Sūtras* cryptic and incomprehensible, and the commentaries, at least of the two streams noted above, conflicting and in radical disagreement among themselves,⁶⁷ the various *Vedānta* traditions have engaged in debate for centuries on these basic ontological issues. Indeed, they continue to do so and, in fact, this has become part of their very mandate and preparatory training for lineage

initiates (and new Vedānta schools periodically emerge).⁶⁸ These debates prioritize and revolve around hermeneutics and exegesis (scriptural interpretation) but engage logic, *nyāya*, in substantial ways. In fact, since Indic philosophy rarely proceeds without a refutation of opposing views, the *pūrva-pakṣa*, the argumentation honed around these issues, has been one of the primary issues defining the various schools, particularly, but by no means exclusively, within Vedānta circles.⁶⁹ One need only consider the massive amount of attention the twelfth-century theologian Rāmānuja directs against the *advaita* position right at the very outset of his commentary on the *Vedānta Sūtras* (I.1.1), which takes up about a fifth of his bulky commentary on the entire text,⁷⁰ to get a sense of how philosophically problematic—and theologically offensive—the Vaiṣṇavas find this attempt to deny ultimate ontological reality to their beloved *Īśvara*.

Jīva is heir to a number of anti-*advaita* arguments, which, along with so much else, we have noted are inherited from the great theologians Rāmānuja and Madhva by the later Vaiṣṇava schools. An exposition of them would be extensive and beyond the scope of our focus.⁷¹ But we hope the reader who has been patient enough to endure the modicum of background philosophical information outlined above has a better sense of some of the different ways of understanding *Īśvara* and their origins. Hopefully it is also clear by now why the status assigned to *Īśvara* will be pivotal to understanding the different ways *bhakti* is understood in these various traditions, keeping in mind our framing of the syntactical nature of *bhakti* as involving an *Īśvara* as distinct object of *bhakti*, a *bhakta* as a distinct agent of *bhakti*, and *bhakti yoga* itself as the performance of devotional acts in a phenomenal world.

In this regard, before proceeding, I suggest that the friction such arguments generate is more than mere standard interschool polemics. For our purposes in understanding Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, the perennial impulse to defend the ultimacy of *Īśvara* can perhaps also be understood as a reflection of the deep devotion of the Vaiṣṇavas, and the eternality of the loving relationship with *Īśvara* that they envision for themselves

forevermore, such that they will vigorously contest any suggestion “that *Īśvara* has been imagined by the *jīva* (*ātman*) under the spell of *avidyā*” (*Bhakti Sandarbha anu* 40). Hence *Jīva*, after presenting his personalist, individualist, realist, and monotheistic arguments, concludes: “Since the distinction between *Īśvara*, the support of *māyā*, and the *jīva* who is deluded by *māyā*, is established, it can be concluded that devotional activity, *bhajana* (*bhakti*),⁷² is the method of attaining perfection” (*anu* 44). Indeed, the main concern of his *Sandarbhās* is to marshal philosophy and hermeneutics in support of *bhakti* as both method and goal.

Finally, and not at all irrelevant to the *Bhāgavata*’s self-perception, as well as its verdict on these differing possible monistic and monotheistic readings of the Vedānta texts, is the fact that it presents itself as being written by the great Vyāsa (also known as Bādarāyaṇa). As noted previously (and discussed further in appendix 1), Vyāsa is the same person whom tradition assigns as author of the *Vedānta Sūtras* itself, the commentary on the Upaniṣads that was intended to clarify all such philosophical differences. We will discover, in the Tale of Vyāsa, that he was despondent after writing the *Vedānta Sūtras*, as well as all his other works, including the Vedas and Upaniṣads, precisely because he had not clearly and unambiguously elaborated on *Īśvara* as the highest eternal reality: “Having compiled the collection of Purāṇas, and composed the *Vedānta Sūtras*, he remained dissatisfied; thus he composed the *Bhāgavata* as the natural commentary on his own *Vedānta Sūtras*” (*Tattva Sandarbha*, 19). In this way, the *Bhāgavata* positions itself as “the essence of all Vedānta,” a clarificatory commentarial elaboration on the Vedānta by the same author and thus the last word in regard to all these issues (XII.13.15).

A Three-Tiered Hierarchy of *Brahman*

We now turn to the position of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* itself on all this, which will open up a further dimension pertaining to an issue we have skirted repeatedly: the experiential difference between exclusive absorption of the consciousness of the *ātman* in its own nature as pure

consciousness and exclusive absorption of the consciousness of the *ātman* in *Īśvara* and, specifically, in the specifics of a personal relationship with Him. In other words, it will probe the hierarchy within the transcendent Absolute Truth itself as argued by the Vaiṣṇava Vedānta theologians (the “differentiation” of Rāmānuja’s *viśiṣṭādvaita*). Here we introduce the most important *Bhāgavata* verse dealing with the ontology (the basic categories of existence) of Jīva’s Kṛṣṇa tradition: Those who know the Truth speak of the knowledge of that nondual Truth (*advaya*)⁷³ as being known as *Brahman*, *Paramātmān*, and *Bhagavān*.” (I.2.11)⁷⁴

This verse is essential in understanding this tradition’s metaphysics of *bhakti*, because the three terms it contains are not synonyms, but ontological hierarchies. Before commencing the *Bhakti Sandarbha*, Jīva had dedicated the previous four *Sandarbhās* to discussing the differences among these three expressions of the Absolute mentioned in this verse: *Brahman*, *Paramātmān*, and *Bhagavān*. This subject is understandably too extensive to detain us in great detail here, but we can partly summarize things by noting that while the Absolute Truth is indeed nondual (*advaya*, more typically referred to as *advaita* or *abheda*), this does not preclude differences within that one reality, as we have encountered with Rāmānuja. There are differences between *Īśvara* and His powers, *śaktis*. Just as, in a favorite Vaiṣṇava simile,⁷⁵ the sun and its powers are in one sense nondual—that is, the sun is one with its powers of light and heat—yet they are also in some sense distinct (one is causal, the other derivative, diminished, and secondary), so, likewise, there are differentiations within the nonduality of the Absolute (*Tattva Sandarbha anu* 43). Additionally, says Jīva, continuing the metaphor, just as the individual particles of light rays are always distinct from one another, so is the case with the plurality of eternally individual *ātmans*.

Incidentally, Vaiṣṇavism shares this latter view—the irreducible individuality of the *ātman*—with almost all schools of Hindu philosophy, including all the so-called six classical schools of Hindu philosophy except the *advaita* sub-branch of Vedānta: Yoga, Sāṅkhya, Nyāya,

Vaiśeṣikā, Mīmāṃsā, and, from Vedānta, the “Vaiṣṇava” strains noted above all defend the individuality of the *ātman* on philosophical grounds. The *ātman* may be infinite in terms of the potential spread of its awareness, like the light of a solitary lightbulb were there no atmospheric or other blockages, but it is an irreducible and individual spiritual quantum, distinct from other *ātmans*. This holds true even as there is no awareness of any distinctions or “otherness” in pure consciousness when it is immersed in its own nature—there is only an awareness of infinite, eternal, nondual awareness itself. While it is prevalent in both domestic and exported neo-Hindu expressions, the *advaita* sub-branch of Vedānta is not representative from the perspective of the classical schools of premodern Indic philosophy—including Jain and Buddhist thought—in terms of not recognizing the individuality of consciousness (although, as discussed, the Śākta traditions are also monistic when it comes to the individuality of the *ātman*). This is not to say that it did not become a very important school, as is underscored by the fact that all the other later schools had to respond to its tenets in some form or fashion.

Within this tripartite hierarchy of *Bhāgavata* I.2.11 quoted above, for Jīva, the *Brahman* aspect is nonpersonal consciousness—the *ātman/puruṣa* goal of some of the Upaniṣads, the *Yoga Sūtras*, and most other *ātman*-seeking traditions, including *advaita Vedānta*.⁷⁶ In the sun metaphor, it can be analogized with the formless, qualityless, all-pervading light: “You are also that *Brahman*, the supreme light, spread out like the ether” (*Bhāgavata* IV.24.60). But the point in this analogy is that light emanates from a higher source, the sun. Nonetheless, within this impersonal effulgence, there are myriad individualized *ātmans* that, like the sun-ray particles, can partake of and “merge into” the greater body of the all-pervading light. Thus, this experience is one of eternity and infinity, devoid of all objects other than blissful consciousness itself. As the light of numerous small autonomous flames can radiate out and coextensively “merge” into one greater generic body of light, while yet remaining the light of multiple individual flames, so the consciousness of

myriad *ātmans* can all “merge” into *Brahman*, sharing in one infinite, blissful, eternal experience of pure contentless awareness itself, while yet remaining distinct *ātmans*, according to Vaiṣṇava thought (and, for that matter, the philosophies of Sāṅkhya and Yoga).

The *Bhāgavata* joins other traditions in calling the experience of this aspect of *Brahman* “*jñāna*, the perception of the nondual *ātman*” (XI.19.27). In other words, since the *ātman* is an eternal part of *Brahman*, when it becomes aware of its own nature as pure consciousness, this is tantamount to awareness (*jñāna*) of *Brahman* itself (albeit of only one expression of *Brahman*), hence the synonymity of labeling this experience either *Brahman* awareness or *ātman* awareness (*brahma-jñāna/ātma-jñāna*, or sometimes just *jñāna*). Indeed, there are many passages in the text that focus on this nondual type of experience in very *advaitic* language.⁷⁷ But for Vaiṣṇava theologians, this merging of the sun ray into its light does not necessarily lead to an experience of the source of light, the sun itself. Likewise, the *ātman*’s “merging” into the impersonal *Brahman* effulgence does not lead to an experience of *Bhagavān*, as we will see.

We need not concern ourselves here with the second aspect of the Absolute mentioned in the verse, *Paramātman*, to which Jīva has dedicated an entire *Sandarbha*, the *Paramātmā Sandarbha* (the third from the six), other than to note that it refers to the plethora of derivative Viṣṇu forms.⁷⁸ However, beyond even these, and certainly beyond the nonpersonal, nondual *Brahman/ātman* expression of pure consciousness, in hierarchical turn, is the third item quoted, *Bhagavān*, who is *Īśvara*, the Supreme Person in complete fullness, the source and possessor of all powers, including both the *ātman* and *prakṛti*.⁷⁹ In our metaphor, Kṛṣṇa is the source sun, from whom all derivative powers and entities such as *prakṛti* and the *ātmans* emanate and are sustained (*Gītā* VII.4–7). It is this very personal *Bhagavān* abiding in His *Brahman* realm of Goloka that is the object of *bhakti* in the Kṛṣṇa traditions.

The Absolute is thus not monolithic, standardized, or, so to speak, one-size-fits-all. The aspect of the Absolute that appears coherent and

appealing to any particular individual is a reflection of that person's presuppositions (which, in *yoga* categories, are nothing other than previously cultivated *saṃskāras*, mental imprints, embedded in the *citta*, quite likely from previous lives). In actuality, one generally simply accepts the theological and metaphysical specifics of the tradition to which one connects, either because of inherited cultural or family reasons or because of being inspired by a charismatic *guru* figure whose lineage one simply adopts out of faith, as noted previously. In any event, the aspect of the Absolute one perceives is a reflection of the perceiver: "Although *Bhagavān* is one, he is approached through different mind-sets and perspectives [of the perceivers] and so perceived variously as the person *Īśvara*, as *Paramātmān* or as *Brahman*, pure consciousness" (III.32.26). As with everything else, free will plays a role here: "The sages see [the absolute] differently and in a particular way according to their desire" (*anu* 7). There are choices to be made. One can seek the reimmersion of pure consciousness in its own nature as *ātmān*/*Brahman*—the goal of the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali⁸⁰ and of Sāṅkhya and, as we know, of *advaita Vedānta*, irrespective of whether it is individualized or not (anyway a scholastic issue, of interest to the *prakṛtic* mind). Or one can seek an eternal loving relationship with a personal God who encompasses but transcends the individual *ātmān*—the goal of the *Bhāgavata* and the Vaiṣṇava reading of the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

This highest personal Truth of *Bhagavān*, then, for those selecting this latter option, being supremely independent, cannot be captured by *yoga* virtuosity and diligence, as can the *ātmān*, but can be attained only by grace. We can now better appreciate the previous discussion as to why this grace is incurred only by *bhakti*: "Neither Yoga, nor Sāṅkhya, nor *dharma*, nor study (*svādhyāya*), nor austerity (*tapas*), nor renunciation can attain Me, O Uddhava, as can intense *bhakti* to Me" (XI.14.20; see also *Gītā* XI.53–54). These other paths are by no means erroneous or incorrect, but they are deemed partial in the goals they provide according to their own reckonings of these goals. Put differently, in *Bhāgavata* theology, since the *ātmān* is only an aspect of the Absolute,⁸¹

one experiencing the *ātman* through other *yoga* systems has experienced that aspect of the Absolute, but not the Supreme Person Himself (*Puruṣa-uttama*⁸²). *Īśvara*, *Bhagavān*. *Bhagavān* supports but transcends the *ātman* and thus constitutes the full and complete entirety of the Absolute. We will continue to expand below on all this ontology, but note, for now, that through *bhakti*, realization of the *ātman* (*ātma-jñāna*) is anyway picked up unsolicited along the way:⁸³ “Because of the insurmountable bliss of *bhakti*, although the *bhaktas* have no interest even in final liberation, which is the supreme goal of life, liberation anyway manifests itself, so all goals are fulfilled by dint of devotion to *Bhagavān*” (V.6.17); “*Bhakti yoga* performed for *Bhagavān* Vāsudeva quickly bestows detachment (*vairāgya*) and causeless knowledge, *jñāna* [of the *ātman*]” (I.2.7). But the *bhakta*, either realizing that this is not the end of the journey, or, as will be exemplified below, encountering fortuitously the narrations of *Īśvara*, keeps going, as his or her interest is the Supreme *Ātman* beyond, *Paramātmān*⁸⁴ *Bhagavān*, the Godhead who sustains but transcends the individual *ātman*.

The Rejection of *Brahman*

Ultimately, the reason the *bhakta* is interested in *Bhagavān* rather than solely the individual *ātman* boils down to a simple fact: whatever bliss (*ānanda*) is inherent in the *ātman* (*Brahman*) pales in comparison with the bliss experienced when coming in contact with the source of all bliss, *Bhagavān*. Rūpa states that “if the bliss of *Brahman* were multiplied billions of times, it would not equal a drop in the ocean of the happiness of *bhakti*!” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant I.1.38). This is a response to the Upaniṣads, where the bliss of *Brahman* is itself billions of times greater than the highest imaginable bliss in the world (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka* IV.3.32–33; *Taittirīya* II.8).

All living beings ultimately seek bliss, *ānanda*, in some form or fashion, but what constitutes bliss is evaluated differently. For those ignorant of the *ātman*, it is determined in accordance with the *guṇas* prominent in the mind. So, following the *Gītā*, for those in *sattva*,

happiness comes from tranquillity of mind, and even though cultivating this in the beginning is unpalatable (typically because old *rājasic* and *tāmasic saṁskāras* forcefully protest at the outset as one struggles to break their impulses), it develops into nectar in the end (XVIII.37).⁸⁵ For those in *rajas*, happiness is sought from sensual indulgences, and although this appears like nectar in the beginning, it ends as poison (XVIII.38). Sensual pleasures are temporal, and one becomes frustrated when they come to an end or when they cannot be attained in the first place; moreover, there is always a hidden and unexpected price tag on sensual indulgences. Happiness in *tamas* is sought in sleep, laziness, and intoxication, and these delude the self both in the beginning and in the end (XVIII.39). Thus, while the happiness of *sattva* is deemed to be the highest attainable by the material mind, as Patañjali states, the wise perceive that all happiness produced by the *guṇas* is actually suffering, even that of *sattva*. This is because such happiness is always temporary and subject to change, and it is always afflicted by the inevitable unwelcome intrusions and inconveniences of embodied life (II.15). So all happiness derived from the *guṇas* binds the *ātman* (*Gītā* XIV.5ff.).

For those pursuing knowledge of the self, who reject these types of so-called happiness temporarily produced by the *guṇas* (*Gītā* V.21–22), happiness is identified as lying beyond the mind, as the “infinite bliss” inherent in the *ātman* itself (*Gītā* VI.21–22). The paths of generic *yoga* and *jñāna* strive for this bliss (or, with Nyāya, freedom from suffering⁸⁶). But *bhakti* proposes an even higher state of bliss attainable by the devotionalized mind. First of all, even before attaining its grand finale of a vision of *Bhagavān* and a direct personal relationship with Him, simply initiating the practices of *bhakti yoga* is joyful in comparison with other processes, precisely because of its connection with *Bhagavān*, who is the source of bliss.⁸⁷ Compared with this, “even pure knowledge (*jñāna*) [of the *ātman*] is unattractive when devoid of love for Kṛṣṇa” (I.5.12). For the *Bhāgavata*, the path of *jñāna* and nondevotional *yoga* is, in actuality, dry, tedious, frustrating, and seemingly never-ending in comparison: “Those who have rejected *bhakti*, the most beneficial path, toil hard to

obtain knowledge [of the *ātman*] exclusively. For them toil itself is the only outcome, nothing else, just like those who thresh the coarse outer husks of grain” (X.14.4).

In fact, the text goes so far as to suggest that those who realize the *ātman* may not in fact even be able to remain in that state if they neglect *bhakti*: “Others, O lotus-eyed One [Kṛṣṇa], consider themselves liberated, but their minds are impure because of turning away from You. They attain the highest destination [realization of the *ātman*] with difficulty, but, since their minds are indifferent to Your lotus feet, they fall back down” (X.2.32). In other words, the latent desires (*kleśas*) of the mind may be in a state of suppression (*nirodhaḥ*) for prolonged periods, but without *bhakti*, they may resurface and compel consciousness back into the realm of *prakṛti*. We note that even Patañjali includes *Īśvara-praṇidhāna*, devotion to *Īśvara*—which Vyāsa in his commentary glosses as *bhakti viśeṣa*, “a special type of *bhakti*”—as a requisite practice for removing the *kleśas* (II.1–2). This position that even *mokṣa* can be attained only by the grace of *Īśvara* in fact has much earlier precedents (*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* VI.15; *Mokṣadharmā* 300.3).

But the *Bhāgavata* takes a significant step further still: some *yogīs* who have already attained the state beyond the *guṇas*—whose minds have been suppressed such that consciousness can be exclusively immersed in its own nature of consciousness, *ātma-jñāna* (in other words, who have attained the goal of classical *yoga*)—relinquish this state and voluntarily *reconnect* with their senses and minds in order to hear, study, and speak about the pastimes (*līlās*) of Kṛṣṇa. The goal of traditions such as that of Patañjali is precisely to *disconnect* from the mind and senses in order to reimmerge consciousness in its own nature.⁸⁸ But numerous *ātman*-realized *yogīs* who have actually attained this state, if they somehow encounter *Bhagavān* and consequently become *bhaktas*, opt to reconnect with the very mind and senses they had previously endeavored so arduously to transcend. This is in order to be able to become immersed in thoughts of *Bhagavān*, specifically of His form, qualities, and deeds, for which they need the mind and senses of perception (we will discuss

the spiritual *Brahman* mind and senses attained in the postmortem liberated state later). King Parīkṣit, the recipient of the *Bhāgavata*, is confused by sage Śuka's exemplification of this anomaly: "Śuka had renounced all worldly activities, and was without attachments, and indifferent to everything, O sage. He was absorbed in the bliss of the *ātman* self. Why did he then study this huge work [the *Bhāgavata*]?"

Sage Saunaka replies: "Sages who delight in the *ātman* self, who are without worldly bonds, perform devotion to Hari without any motive, such is the nature of His qualities. Therefore, Śuka, son of Bādarāyaṇa [Vyāsa], whose mind had become captured by the qualities of Hari, studied this great narration." (I.7.9–11) This is repeated again at the end of the text: "Śuka's consciousness (*ceta*) was fixed in the bliss of his own self and he had cast off all notions of duality. Nonetheless, his fixity was drawn away by the delightful *līlās*, pastimes, of the infallible Ajita [Kṛṣṇa]" (12.12.68). And, indeed, Śuka states this about himself: "Although I was fixed in the state beyond the *guṇas*, my mind was captured by the *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa; and so I learned about His pastimes" (2.1.9). His father, too, the great Vyāsa, "although he was fixed in the bliss of the self and devoid of any other thought, his heart was attracted to the enchanting *līlās* of the infallible Kṛṣṇa; out of kindness [for others], he then composed this *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*" (XII.12.68).

As will be especially encountered in the tenth book, then, the *Bhāgavata*, promotes the bliss of sensual contact with Kṛṣṇa as far superior to any bliss inherent in the *ātman* when immersed in its own nature after uncoupling from the *prakṛtic guṇas*. Such contact with Kṛṣṇa can be attained either directly for those who had accumulated enough merit to have been born during His incarnation or, for those born thereafter, indirectly by means of hearing about His pastimes from the tenth book (or, of course, eternally in the post-liberated realm of Goloka or Vaikuṇṭha). Either way, the bliss received by means of the senses and mind, whether made of *prakṛti* or *Brahman*, from contact with *Īśvara*,

including hearing about His activities through the ear, is held to eclipse the bliss of the *ātman*'s self-absorption. We can recall that one of the characteristics of *bhakti* delineated by Rūpa is that it minimizes interest in *mokṣa*—*Brahman*/*ātman*-centered liberation. This is a theme repeated again and again in the *Bhāgavata*.⁸⁹ The text is simply pervaded with claims to the effect that *mokṣa* is rejected by the *bhaktas* who are fully satisfied serving Kṛṣṇa,⁹⁰ or simply hearing or chanting about and meditating on Him,⁹¹ and especially rejected if it means separation from Kṛṣṇa.⁹² Put more dramatically, devoid of the presence of the beloved Lord, *mokṣa* is, in fact, equal to hell (VI.17.28). This phenomenon, in turn, leads to another of the six characteristics of *bhakti* identified by Rūpa—the difficulty of the attainment of real (unmixed) *bhakti*: “Among tens of millions of those perfected beings who have attained *mukti*, liberation, one who is devoted to Nārāyaṇa is very hard to find” (VI.14.5). Here, the *Bhāgavata* is echoing the *Gītā*: “Among thousands of people, hardly any strive for perfection. And of those striving and even from those who have attained perfection, hardly any know Me in truth” (VII.3). The flip side of this is that “until the *yogī* does not become disillusioned with the various other paths of *yoga*, he or she will not develop attraction for the stories of Kṛṣṇa” (IV.23.12).⁹³

Who Is the Supreme *Īśvara*?: The Purāṇic Context

Moving on to the second fundamental issue we raised at the beginning of this section concerning *Īśvara* as the object or recipient of *bhakti*, what is the *Bhāgavata*'s justification for identifying the highest expression of *Īśvara* as Kṛṣṇa, as opposed to other claimants to this position, most specifically, Śiva or Viṣṇu? In other words, given that most Hindu traditions, including *advaita Vedānta*, accept *Īśvara* in some sort of sense, then, bracketing the issue touched upon above as to whether *Īśvara* is the ultimate and causal entity or a nonultimate and derivative entity (or, as per *advaita*, a superimposition on the Absolute), since everyone accepts an *Īśvara* at some level, then who is the ultimate *Īśvara*? This discussion plays out more in Purāṇa-related than in Vedānta contexts. At

the risk of repetition (given the common misperception of Hinduism as polytheistic), Hindu theists of all *bhakti* schools hold that *Īśvara*, if unlimited, can assume unlimited *Īśvara* forms (irrespective of whether these are ultimately true, as per the Vaiṣṇavas, or only relatively true, as per *advaita*). So the question is not who is the real and true *Īśvara* and who is not, but which of these forms is the source, causal *Īśvara* from whom the other *Īśvaras* emanate—or, in the language of the *Bhāgavata*, the seed from which other *avatāras* emerge (III.9.2)? Readers familiar with the various streams of post-Vedic *bhakti* know that these are not polytheistic, but either monotheistic or monistic. Therefore, these *Īśvara* forms are not independent autonomous equals, as is (more or less) the case with polytheism, but emanate from one source. Either this source is monistic—reflecting the discussion above, where *Īśvara* (whether real or illusory) is held to be nonultimate and derived from a higher Absolute—which in its highest and ultimate expression is a qualityless, nonindividualized Truth, or this source is monotheistic, which requires one original, ultimate, Supreme *Īśvara*. So both monism and monotheism in their very different ways constitute a “mono-source,” not a “poly-source.” But either way, one still has to account for the relationship among the multifarious *Īśvaras*. Accordingly, most traditions (even, in his own way, Śaṅkara) end up subscribing to one particular form of *Īśvara* as the fountainhead of all other *Īśvara* emanations. And, once again, we are referring exclusively to Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu and His incarnations, Śiva, and their consorts (God on high with a capital “G”)—not to the lower-level celestials in *saṁsāra* (gods with a small “g”), whose worship in the Vedic period can in fact be seen as constituting a type of polytheism.⁹⁴

We should also note that this is a scholastic issue: the vast majority of Hindus offer devotion to numerous forms and personalities of *Īśvara*, especially in cultural contexts such as participating in the major celebratory days associated with the different forms of *Īśvara*—for example, *janmāṣṭami*, Kṛṣṇa’s birthday; *Rāma-navamī*, Rāma’s birthday; and *Śivarātri*, sacred to Śiva.⁹⁵ Even though most Hindus, and certainly

most who have a serious *bhakti* practice, will orient their own personal and private everyday devotion toward one particular form, the *iṣṭa-devatā*, Lord of the heart (noted, for instance, in *Yoga Sūtras* II.44), the question of which *Īśvara* is primary and ultimate and which derivative and emanational is far more a feature of scholastic and lineage-bearing⁹⁶ *bhakti* than the generic *bhakti* encountered on a grassroots level. Nonetheless, emerging traditions needed to establish their credentials and sectarian partialities based on the intellectual and epistemological criteria of the time. This, in Vedānta circles, as we can see with Jīva's defense of the authority of the *Bhāgavata* itself (see appendix 1), meant quoting scripture, the *Śrūti* and *Smṛti*.⁹⁷ And this, in turn, required a significant degree of scholasticism.

Before we engage some of the intellectual issues that have been (and remain) important to the theologians of the various *bhakti* sects, let us consider *Īśvara* from a heart (nonscholastic) perspective—one much more reflective of the on-the-ground *bhakti* of the practitioner. Ultimately, one's preference for a particular *Īśvara* form, the *iṣṭa-devatā* (worshipful Lord) such as Kṛṣṇa or Śiva, over any other should reflect the heart inclination of the devotee and nothing more. There are various ways one can encounter and subsequently develop such an emotional relationship with who becomes one's *iṣṭa-devatā*. Often, for example, this may simply be inherited from one's family tradition, or local culture, and thus reflects one's *karma* in the form of birth (*jati*), and geography (*deśa*), along the lines of *Yoga Sūtras* II.13. For those perhaps more dedicated to pursuing a path less preconditioned by the accidents of familial or regional culture, one's *iṣṭa-devatā* is most often simply inherited from one's *guru*, as discussed previously. In other words, one first becomes attracted by a charismatic individual whose spiritual qualities one wishes to emulate, and then, as this relationship deepens into a *guru*-disciple relationship, one subsequently adopts the *Īśvara* form—and in fact entire edifice of theological and ritual specificities associated with that form—from this *guru*'s lineage. This is by far the most common manner of connecting to a form of *Īśvara* for those

stepping outside of their birth traditions, including Westerners. (We see, in the West, the partiality of Neem Karoli Baba’s followers to Rāma and Hanumān, for example, Swami Mukṭānanda’s to Śiva, and Bhaktivedānta Swami’s to Kṛṣṇa, the disciples typically following the preference or lineage deity of their *guru*.) Attraction to one’s *iṣṭa-devatā* may also be born from reading the stories connected with the various *Īśvara* incarnations and manifestations, as per Patañjali’s *svādhyāyād iṣṭa-devatā-samprayogaḥ*, “from study, one encounters one’s Lord of the heart” (II.44). Just as in romantic relationships in the human realm (at least in their idealized form), a person looking for love or for a spouse might undertake a dating spree in order to seek opportunities to become acquainted with a suitable person, so in *bhakti* one can seek one’s *iṣṭa-devatā* by undertaking a study project of the respective texts associated with the various *Īśvara* options—Kṛṣṇa, Śiva, Rāma, the Goddess, and so on. As in human relationships, from all the available possible romantic partners, an eventual attraction evolves from association and from discovering more and more about the qualities and attributes of one particular person, and this (ideally) develops into love, so, in divine relationships, an attraction to a particular *Īśvara* form can be accomplished by *svādhyāya*, study. One explores the universe of various *Īśvara* forms by immersing oneself in their stories, forms, qualities, deeds, and modes of interaction with their devotees (for instance, by reading the *Bhāgavata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, and Śiva-and Devī-centered texts), and eventually one’s heart becomes naturally especially attracted to one specific manifestation of *Īśvara*. He or She becomes one’s *iṣṭa-devatā*. This usually means that one subsequently adopts that manifestation’s specific name as one’s *japa mantra* and engages in worship of His or Her deity form following the specifics of ritual associated with that form⁹⁸—in other words, one engages the nine processes of *bhakti* (or sectarian variants of them) centered on that form. For most Hindus, it is these types of natural and spontaneous attractions for a particular form of *Īśvara*—always appreciative of and ready to honor and participate in the worship of other forms, but privately devoted to one’s own cherished

iṣṭa-devatā—that lies at the heart of the dedicated *bhakti yoga* of the committed practitioner.

There is a touching story in the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* underscoring the personal and heart nature of true *bhakti*, where love for an adored form of *Īśvara* transcends all social or cultural legislation and, in this case, even the presence of an enormously powerful *guru* charismatic (indeed, one considered an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa Himself in Jīva’s Gauḍīya tradition), *Śrī Caitanya*. Caitanya lovingly recounts the immovable faith of Murāri Gupta in *Śrī Rāma*, despite his testing this by persistently promoting the unsurpassed superexcellence of Kṛṣṇa: Once I tried to tempt him again and again, “Most sweet, O Gupta is Vrajendrakumāra [Kṛṣṇa], Bhagavān Himself;... His actions are sweet, the *līlā* of Kṛṣṇa is sweet. Worship that Kṛṣṇa, take refuge in that Kṛṣṇa; there is no worship in the heart apart from that Kṛṣṇa.” In this way again and again he listened to my words, and because of my praise, his mind was turned a little ... he went to his home and he reflected, into the night, and he thought anxiously about his abandonment of Raghunātha [Rāma]. “How shall I abandon the feet of Raghunātha? Kill me, O Rāma, tonight!” Thus he wept the whole night; he had no peace of mind, and he was awake all the night. In the morning he came and held my feet, and weeping he pleaded with me thus. “I have laid my head at the feet of Raghunātha. I cannot take my head away, there is pain in my heart.... Tell me what I should do. In this situation, give mercy to me, O you who are full of mercy; let me die before you, let this indecision be over.” When I heard this, I was very happy in my mind, and I raised him up and embraced him. “O most perfect Gupta, your faith is very deep; your heart has not been shaken by my words ... to know the firmness of your *bhāva* (love) I have tempted you again and again. You are a servant of Rāma like the incarnate Hanumān; how could you abandon His lotus feet?” That Murāri Gupta is like my own heart; when I hear of his humility, my heart bursts. (*Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, *Mādhya līlā* 15.138–57) The point is, just as in human romantic affairs, although one may personally find the qualities and appearance of one’s intimate beloved the most attractive,

there is no need to disparage other candidates or seek to lure someone away from his or her heart's different choice. Likewise, one can have an intense relationship with one's *iṣṭa-devatā* without the need for any sectarian exclusivism (or, for that matter, the inclusivistic hierarchization that we will encounter with Jīva that is so typical of Hinduism). This author's own teacher, just as an example of this, despite being a lifelong ascetic *bhakta* of Kṛṣṇa and ultraorthodox *ācārya* lineage bearer of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, initiates his last published work⁹⁹ with the following invocation: *Mādhavomādhavāv īśau sarva-siddhi-vidhāyinau Vande parasparātmānau paraspara-nati-prīyau* I offer my obeisances to the two *Īśvaras*—Kṛṣṇa, the husband of Mā¹⁰⁰ (Lakṣmī), and Śiva, the husband of Umā (Parvatī), who are the source of all perfection.

They are always united, and filled with mutual love and respect for each other.

Such catholic spirit is not just a cultural matter, and certainly not anything to do with modern notions of political correctness: all schools accept that the different manifestations of *Īśvara* are factually and ontologically the same Supreme Being. Consider the *Bhāgavata* story of sage Atri (IV.1.19–30), who performed intense austerities on one foot (*eka-pāda-āsana*), meditating on “the *Īśvara* of the universe” (*jagad-Īśvara*). Eventually, Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Brahmā all appeared before him. Confused, he told them that he had supplicated “the one *Bhagavān*.” Why had three of them come? Smiling, they replied, “We are that one!” This multiplicity-in-oneness is the Vaiṣṇava form of monotheism.

Nonetheless, if one has been entrusted with the *dharma* of safeguarding the parameters of a sect's theological specifics, as is the case with Jīva, one must rise up to establish the bona fides of one's tradition in accordance with the methodologies and epistemologies of one's time, lest it be belittled by opposing schools or ridiculed as emotional foolishness. And the Gauḍīya tradition, while honoring and relishing all the divine manifestations, is entrusted by its founder, Śrī Caitanya, with spreading the sweetness of *rāgānugā bhakti* to Śrī Kṛṣṇa as

the highest expression of personal love of God (a goal deemed not only to be the summum bonum of life and human existence, but the solution to all human problems). Perhaps we can consider this feature of Hindu *bhakti* a type of eclectic sectarianism. Jīva and the other *Gosvāmīs* perceive their dedication to making these teachings of *bhakti* available in accordance with the scholastic and intellectual criteria of their day as the highest welfare work for human well-being. Apart from the belief that the sweetness of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* produces the highest possible ecstasy attainable by the *ātman*, these *bhakti* teachings are, of course, embedded within the generic *yoga* perspective that the ultimate cause of the suffering of all embodied beings stems from the pursuit of desires pertaining to the body/mind temporal self, as we have discussed. Teaching about such things is their solution to suffering and the human condition. But while Vaiṣṇavas accept the standard *yogic* notion that the only ultimate solution is knowledge of the true *ātman* self, they additionally identify the even more fundamental cause of suffering as aversion toward *Īśvara*. The *Gosvāmīs* are thus entrusted to present these teachings—especially the unparalleled sweetness of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*—as their contribution to ultimate human welfare. Hence the enormous investment Jīva and Rūpa devoted to their writings and to justifying their prioritization of Kṛṣṇa by recourse to reason and scriptural engagement, where they could easily have followed the life of other *bābās* (ascetics) of their day and simply immersed themselves in their *japa*, *kīrtana*, and *pūjās* in solitude. This is their service.

Before returning to our scholastic and sectarian questions pertaining to the source *Īśvara*, let us linger on this for another moment: from the point of view of theologians like Jīva, scholasticism itself is perceived as a spiritual service to humanity. Even though *Īśvara* is beyond the grasp of the intellect, formulating coherent and systematic theologies is seen as a service for those who need some degree of rationality to underpin their foray into the transrational. Intellectuality, scholasticism, or the articulation of lineage-specific theologies and practices need not be, in and of themselves, spiritually oppressive, limiting, or stifling to spiritual

reality, as they are sometimes depicted, or somehow blockages to or overlays over the experience of unfettered Truth. Those intellectually inclined need at least a preliminary rational platform from which to take that leap of faith into a domain beyond reason. This is all the more so since *bhakti* traditions are often condescendingly portrayed as emotional religiosity for the populous masses devoid of any intellectual substance (and this was so even in the sixteenth century in Jīva's time, as in the eleventh century in Rāmānuja's before him).¹⁰¹ In addition to this, certain scholastics may be entrusted with preserving the logic, rationale, and time-tested value of lineage-specific rituals, practices, and protocols lest these become diluted in the name of eclecticism. All this is the *dharma* of the theologian, which, like any *dharma*, becomes *bhakti* when performed with devotion and offered to *Īśvara*. *Bhakti*, as we know from the *Gītā* (for instance, see IX.27), entails offering whatever one possesses and whatever assets one is endowed with to *Īśvara*. Thus, there are those with intellectual gifts and inclinations, who are moved by their love and devotion to the form of *Īśvara* with which they are enamored to attempt to articulate the superexcellence of their beloved and justify their devotion in accordance with the standard sources of knowledge of the time (such as sense perception, reason, and a consistent interpretation of the sacred texts).¹⁰²

This is what Jīva is doing here and what others have done for other *bhakti* traditions, such as the brilliant scholar-practitioner Abhinavagupta for Kaśmir Śaivism, and Rāmānuja for Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, and so forth. Reason and argument, then, like art, dance, poetry, or anything else—indeed, like the modest leaf, fruit, flower, or water of *Gītā* IX.26—can be offered in devotion to one's beloved *Īśvara* as *bhakti*. With Jīva as our exemplar, then, the following discussion grants us a glimpse at the concerns of one such scholastic practitioner in the sixteenth century, who had been entrusted with articulating a theology centered on Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* that could form the bedrock for the fledgling Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition that was beginning to define itself after the passing away of Śrī Caitanya and thus needed to find scriptural authority to substantiate the

tradition's exclusive focus on Kṛṣṇa as Supreme *Īśvara*.

Drawing from sources long predating the Common Era, the Purāṇa tradition develops into two or perhaps three basic streams: those holding Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa to be the Ultimate *Īśvara*, the Vaiṣṇavas, and those holding Śiva as Ultimate *Īśvara*, the Śaivites.¹⁰³ Overlapping with the latter, and sometimes subsumed within it, a later Śākta stream emerged in literary form (but also with roots in the hoary past), some major expressions of which hold the Goddess to be the Ultimate source Being.¹⁰⁴ We have painted all this with very broad, simplistic strokes here, since our purpose is just to give a flavor of the landscape within which the *Bhāgavata* is negotiating its position. There are all sorts of cross-fertilizing permutations of some of the elements noted above.¹⁰⁵

The position taken by the various sects on such issues is not assumed but must be substantiated by scriptural reference for a lineage to be taken seriously in the vibrant heterogeneous landscape of the *bhakti* traditions. Summarizing briefly, in his first *Sandarbha*, the *Tattva* (*anu* 17), where he defends the supremacy of Kṛṣṇa over other forms of *Īśvara*, Jīva enlists the support of other Purāṇas, beginning with a sequence of verses in the *Matsya Purāṇa*. In this text, we find the Purāṇa corpus divided according to the *guṇas*, with those glorifying Viṣṇu (Hari) considered to be Purāṇas associated with *sattva*, and those Śiva, with *tamas*.¹⁰⁶ In another Purāṇa, the *Padma* (CCXXXVI. 18–21), the specific names of the eighteen Purāṇas¹⁰⁷ are allocated to their respective *guṇas*, with the *Bhāgavata* and other *Vaiṣṇava* Purāṇas placed in the *sattva* category, and the Śaivite ones placed in the *tamas* one. Part of the reason for these associations, in the larger epic and Purāṇa framework, is that Hari/Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa is typically associated with *sattva* and the maintenance of the universe, maintenance being a quality of *sattva*, and Śiva with its destruction, a quality of *tamas*.¹⁰⁸

Since *sattva* is a prerequisite for knowledge (see, for example, *Gītā* XIV.17), Jīva feels justified in asserting the supremacy of the Purāṇas in the *sattva* category. He can now quote the *sāttvic Bhāgavata* itself with less risk of circularity: *Sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* are the *guṇas* of *prakṛti*.

There is one Supreme Being who directs these for the purpose of creation, maintenance, and destruction of this universe. He is named Hari [Viṣṇu], Viriñci [Brahmā], and Hara [Śiva]. From these, the ultimate good is derived from the One whose form is *sattva* [that is, Viṣṇu].¹⁰⁹ [Just as, for the performance of Vedic ritual,] smoke is higher than wood, and fire is higher than that, as it lies at the essence of the [rituals prescribed in the] three Vedas,¹¹⁰ [so] *rajas* is higher than *tamas*, and *sattva* is higher than that, as it bestows the vision of *Brahman*. In the beginning, the sages worshipped *Bhagavān* Viṣṇu, who is pure *sattva* (*viśuddha-sattva*).¹¹¹ Those who follow their example are eligible for liberation. (I.2.23–25) Having argued for the primacy of *Īśvara*, the personal Godhead, over His derivative nonpersonal powers on the basis of Vedānta texts, and then advocated the supremacy of Viṣṇu as ultimate *Īśvara* over other forms of *Īśvara* on the basis of the Purāṇa texts, Jīva had one further step. The Vaiṣṇava schools differ as to whether Viṣṇu is the Ultimate and Supreme *Bhagavān*, who periodically incarnates into the world in various forms, one of which is Kṛṣṇa, or whether Kṛṣṇa is the source Being and Viṣṇu a derivative Being manifest from Him for the purpose of the creation and maintenance of the cosmic order (as the *Paramātmān* touched upon previously). Following the opinion of the *Mahābhārata* epic, *Hairivamśa*,¹¹² and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, the former position is held by the older Vaiṣṇava sects dominant in the south, noteworthy among which are the tenth-to eleventh-century Rāmānuja and twelfth-century Madhva traditions, whose theologies we know paved the way for and significantly underpin the Gauḍīya one. The latter position, based on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Bhagavad Gītā*, surfaces most conspicuously across the north of the subcontinent in the sixteenth century, particularly in the form of Jīva's own school founded by Caitanya, as well as the spiritually cognate tradition stemming from Caitanya's contemporary Vallabha, the founder of the *puṣṭi mārga*.¹¹³ In addition to this identification of Kṛṣṇa as the First Cause of all causes, these latter schools especially stress the unsurpassed nature of Kṛṣṇa's sweetness compared with all other *Īśvara* forms.¹¹⁴ Once again, all schools

ultimately hold both Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu—and Śiva—to be manifestations of the same transcendent “One Supreme Being” who has one form but appears in many forms (X.40.7), so in terms of who came first, the difference is something of a plant-and-seed situation and one mostly of scholarly concern.

The crucial verse in the *Bhāgavata* used by the Kṛṣṇa theologians to justify this preeminence of Kṛṣṇa over all other manifestations of the Godhead is I.3.18. Situated after a number of verses listing Viṣṇu’s previous incarnations, this verse states: “These [other incarnations] are partial derived incarnations (*aṁśa*, or *kalā*), but Kṛṣṇa is *Bhagavān*, God, Himself (*Kṛṣṇas-tu Bhagavān svayam*).” *Aṁśa* means a “portion” or “partial incarnation.” Similar to the relationship between God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in the Christian trinity, the sense of the term is that Kṛṣṇa, as the Supreme Godhead, can maintain His own presence, while simultaneously manifesting some aspect of Himself elsewhere in a separate and distinct presence (or any number of presences). Those secondary or derivative manifestations exhibit a part but not the full characteristics or potency of the source Being (the term *kalā* has similar connotations).¹¹⁵ This concept is very important for understanding the difference between polytheism, where beings are completely separate and more or less equal ontological entities, and the plethora of divine presences in Kṛṣṇa monotheism, which can be thought of as an unlimitedly prolific parallel of the Christian trinity concept: a “multiplicity in one,” so to speak.

This verse becomes something of a *mahāvākya*, a “most important expression” or pivotal, foundational statement,¹¹⁶ for the theology of the Kṛṣṇa sects: all other incarnations are *aṁśas* or *kalās*, partial incarnations, but Kṛṣṇa is *Bhagavān* Himself, the original Being and source of the other incarnations. The importance of I.3.28 for the *Bhāgavata* tradition cannot be overestimated, and it overrides all other conflicting statements: the commentators consider it to be a *paribhāṣā sūtra*, an explanatory assertion that, while occurring in only one verse,

illuminates the entire text, like a lamp that, although situated in only one place, illuminates an entire house. And, again relevant here, and just as was the case with the *Vedānta Sūtras*, since all the Purāṇas are deemed compiled by sage Vyāsa, as we will see in his tale, with the *Bhāgavata* as his grand finale, so to speak, it is consequently taken by Jīva as Vyāsa’s final word not only on all such issues of personal versus nonpersonal modalities of *Brahman*, but also on the hierarchies among *Īśvaras*. And the *Bhāgavata* promotes Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme causal *Īśvara*.

We must stress once more that while this type of argumentation is clearly sectarian, the *bhakti* traditions are inclusivistic sectarianism, not exclusivistic. The *Bhāgavata*, for example, extols Śiva, using similar categories it elsewhere directs to Viṣṇu: I know you, Rudra [Śiva] are the Lord, the undivided *Brahman*, beyond Śiva and Śakti¹¹⁷ who are the seed and womb of the universe. You are *Bhagavān* who, like a spider with its web, playfully create, maintain, and destroy this universe in the forms of Śiva and Śakti, who are one essence. (IV.6.42–43) This is typical of Hinduism, and examples are ubiquitous. In the *Mahābhārata* epic, for example, Viṣṇu says to Śiva: “He who knows You, knows Me. He who follows You, follows Me. There is not the slightest difference between Us both. Let there be no judgment otherwise” (*Mokṣadharmā* CCCXLII.233). The verse is repeated verbatim earlier, adding: “Their reality (*sattva*) is one, their forms are two” (CCCXLI.16). While the *Bhāgavata* generally does not waver about who is the ultimate source Supreme Being,¹¹⁸ it allows those devoted to Śiva to perceive and eulogize Śiva as not only the Supreme Being, but even as the source of Viṣṇu (VIII.7.23), the creator, protector, and destroyer of the universe (IV.6.42–43), the originator of the *guṇas* and everything in existence (VIII.7.21–35), whose abode is inaccessible even to Viṣṇu. The eulogy to Śiva of the *prajāpatīs* (VIII.7.21ff.) could have come right out of the Purāṇas that prioritize Śiva—the *Śiva*, *Līṅga*, and *Skandha Purāṇas*. Ultimately, the *Bhāgavata* allows everyone to follow their own devotional inclinations: “One should worship the Supreme Being in accordance with the preference of one’s mind” (XI.3.48). And, reciprocally, it allows that the Supreme Being

assumes forms not only according to functions (Śiva, as we know, is typically accorded the role of the destroyer in the overall Purāṇic schema), but also in accordance with the particular desires of individual devotees: “You assume whatever form Your devotees meditate upon” (III.9.11); “Whatever forms please Your devotees, are pleasing to You, O Lord” (III.24.31). So this sectarianism is of an eclectic and inclusivistic nature, typical of the *bhakti* of the Purāṇas.

Īśvara, Pure Bhakti, and Motivated Bhakti

Continuing thematically with the differences among the various *Īśvara* forms, another way of differentiating between the *bhakti* performed for Kṛṣṇa and that performed for some of the other divine manifestations, according to the *Bhāgavata* tradition, is that since Kṛṣṇa is pure *sattva*, those who seek the fulfillment of *prakṛti*-related desires are naturally more likely to approach and offer *bhakti* to those other forms of the Divine, which are associated with the fulfillment of those desires. We know from the *Gītā* (XVIII.9 and 23) that *sattva* is associated with freedom from desire and detachment from the fruit of action; *rajas* with desire and attachment to the fruit of desire (indeed, the word for desire, *rāga*, comes from the same root); and *tamas* with apathy toward the fulfillment of desire in general (XVIII.24–25). In the overall Hindu hierarchization of divine plenitude, different types of beings, not all of whom are divine or even benevolent, become associated with different modes of worship and the attainment of different material goals: Those desiring liberation reject the ghastly forms of [other] powerful beings¹¹⁹ and, free from envy, worship the peaceful manifestations of Nārāyaṇa. Those whose natures and characteristics are *rājasic* and *tāmasic*, desiring offspring, power, and opulence, worship the celestial beings, ancestors, and ghosts, *etc.* (I.2.26–27) This principle is illustrated in the *Bhāgavata* in the story of Vṛka. This demon approaches Nārada and, upon asking him which of the great Deities is most easily propitiated, is informed: “Worship Lord Śiva, and you will quickly attain success. He can be easily pleased or easily angered by a small amount of either merit or fault”

(X.88.15). Nārada points out that the great demon Rāvaṇa who kidnapped Sītā in the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic attained his power from worshipping Śiva, as did numerous other demons.¹²⁰ The point here is that those with *tāmasic* malintentions tend to worship forms of Śiva, who, being highly benevolent and easily gratified, accepts such worship, where Viṣṇu, being pure *sattva*, would not (generally¹²¹), nor would His worship likely attract those in *tamas*. Vṛka proceeded to worship Śiva through ghastly austerities—offering the flesh from his own limbs and preparing to sever his own head—and did indeed attain a *tāmasic* boon—the ability to kill anyone by merely laying a hand on that person (X.88). Since the preamble to this story narrated by Śuka to Parīkṣit amply illustrates the *Bhāgavata*’s perspective on the differentiation among Divine Beings and their appeal to different types of worshippers, it is worth quoting at length: Those among the gods, demons, and mortals who worship the austere Śiva are often wealthy and lead a life of enjoyment. But this is not the case with those who worship Hari even though He is the Lord of Lakṣmī, the Goddess of Fortune.... The end results are different for the worshippers of these two Lords, whose personalities are so opposite.... Śiva is always associated with His *śakti* powers. He is enveloped by the *guṇas*, with their three characteristics.¹²² ... So anyone having recourse [to Śiva] enjoys the acquisition of all riches. Hari, however, is untouched by the *guṇas*. He is the Supreme Person beyond *prakṛti*. He is the witness, the seer of everything. One who worships Him becomes free from the *guṇas* ... your grandfather, King Yudhiṣṭhira ... asked Kṛṣṇa the same question [you, Parīkṣit, have asked].... *Bhāgavān* Kṛṣṇa replied as follows ... “I will deprive the person whom I favor of his wealth. At this, his own family members abandon the person who has become poverty-stricken and afflicted by suffering. When his endeavors come to nothing, and he becomes despondent in his attempts to [gain] wealth, then I bestow my favor on him, once he has formed friendship with those devoted to Me. ... But, because I am so hard to worship, people reject Me and worship other gods.” (X.88.1–10) Hopefully the point is clear: the idea that the

Supreme *Īśvara* assumes different personae to cater to the different inclinations and desires of humans would be accepted by most *bhakti* sects. The *Bhāgavata* allows Śiva Himself to state that those who have attained equanimity of perception “do not see even a speck of difference between He Himself and Viṣṇu.” But those with more intense desires perfectly naturally worship the Being who can most quickly fulfill those desires (as indicated in the *Gītā* IV.12), and Śiva is supremely munificent and easily satisfied, *asutoṣa*.¹²³ The *Bhāgavata* certainly recognizes that Śiva is the same *Īśvara* who can bestow liberation (VIII.7.22), that there are realized *yogīs* dedicated to Him who are liberated¹²⁴ (IV.6.45–46), and that there are “*gurus* delighting in the *ātman* who contemplate Śiva in their hearts” (VIII.7.33). So clearly it does not consider all of His devotees to be motivated by mundane *prakṛtic* needs. But it does associate at least most of His followers with those who still have some level of interest in the enjoyments of *prakṛti*.

We will no more than again cursorily note here that some forms of Śiva devotion, such as the Kaśmir Śaivism of the Siddha tradition, promote a goal of complete identification with and the eventual reimmersion of the *ātman* into its potential and inherent Śiva nature, from which vantage point it can, in fact, enjoy the spectacle of *prakṛti*. After all, in Kaśmir Śaivism, *prakṛti* is the *citi-śākti* energy of the Divine—pure vibrational consciousness—so for this tradition it is not *prakṛti* that should be renounced, but the sense of self as an enjoyer separate from Śiva. Once *prakṛti* is fully and actually realized as nondifferent from Śiva, what is there to renounce? Such Śākta schools are philosophically rich and coherent traditions, with considerable theological sophistication. Engaging a robust form of Śiva *bhakti* as method, they promote one of their ultimate goals precisely as the enjoyment of the creative spectacle of *prakṛti* once the practitioner has transcended the limitations of personal ego, *ahankāra*, and realized his or her own true Śiva nature (*svarūpa*).

But this is not the goal sought by the Kṛṣṇa *bhaktas* of Jīva’s tradition.

Of course he does not reject the soteriological possibility of such liberation, as becoming one with Śiva can certainly be accommodated in *Bhāgavata* ontology, given the Vaiṣṇava equivalent in one or two of the five basic types of liberation we have discussed (*ekatvam* with *sārūpya* flavorings). But the reason Jīva deems any form of liberation from the various options discussed previously—or their Śaivite parallels—to be of no interest to true *bhaktas*, even if available, is that they do not facilitate eternal service to *Īśvara*. Service is the sign of true love. And as the other main Śaivite tradition, Śaiva Siddhānta, would agree, eternal service requires an eternal distinction between *Īśvara* as object of *bhakti* and the worshipful *bhakta*. According to the *Bhāgavata*, the worship of the pure forms of Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa are attractive to those who are without desire to enjoy *prakṛti* from any vantage point whatsoever (other than by means of offering *prakṛti* in love and devotion to their beloved). Such *bhaktas* aspire for what for them is the ultimate perfection of *bhakti* free from all personal motives of enjoyment. This perfection is service to the beloved that culminates in an eternal relationship with *Bhagavān* assuming the form of their preference in the trans-*prakṛtic* realms within *Brahman* itself, Vaikuṇṭha and Goloka.

Again, this partiality or preference does not imply that Vaiṣṇavas would deny the possibility of the specific type of liberation proposed by Kaśmir Śaivism or any other such tradition, since, as we have discussed, Vaiṣṇavas accept a parallel type of liberation: Kṛṣṇa *bhaktas* too can merge into Kṛṣṇa (as we will see in the Agha story). Why not, then, a parallel option for Śiva *bhaktas*?¹²⁵ But since, in the *Bhāgavata*, Śiva is accepted as an eternal transcendent Being abiding in His own abode with His liberated *bhaktas*, Jīva's form of *bhakti* finds a closer Śaivite spiritual cognate with Śaiva Siddhānta, since the equivalent of *sārūpya* liberation in that tradition is a state where the liberated *ātman* attains a divine form and qualities identical to Śiva's but distinct from His. Their relationship is both a dualism—as here the soul retains its individuality—and a oneness, since it is inseparably united with Śiva with the bond of love.¹²⁶ It is such love shared between an individual soul and an

eternal *Īśvara* that Kṛṣṇa *bhaktas* seek.

Having said all this, we have applied a Kṛṣṇa-centered lens for our case study to exemplify with some depth one expression of *bhakti*, but we must in fairness note that other Purāṇas express different hierarchies and relationships on such issues: certainly the three main Śaivite Purāṇas, the *Śiva* and the *Linga*, especially, and also the *Skanda*, all promote Śiva's ultimate supremacy over Viṣṇu in various passages,¹²⁷ as does the *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* on behalf of the Goddess.¹²⁸ Much of this type of sectarian rhetoric from all sides, Vaiṣṇava and Śaivite, is not likely to appeal to those who are not already deeply committed to a specific sect. But, by way of a conclusion to all this, the various Purāṇic sects do accept and respect all forms of *Īśvara*. The sectarian hierarchization among the various *Īśvara* forms that becomes important to the scholastic theologians of the various traditions can be seen as expressions of their intense devotion, *bhakti*, for their own *iṣṭa-devatā*. It also reflects their duties as lineage bearers to justify this devotion according to the standard epistemological methodologies of their day for the sake of their followers and for the intellectual dignity of their traditions. But most of all, from a *bhakti* perspective, all this can perhaps be best relished as something of a *līlā*, divine play, among the traditions reflecting the playful exchanges among the divinities themselves described in the various stories of the different Purāṇas as manifestations of what all agree is the one Supreme Being. The bottom line is that *Īśvara* will bestow faith in whatever form is attractive to the *bhakta* (*Gītā* VII.21), and ultimately, if that faith becomes pure, unflinching, and all-consuming, *Īśvara* will appear to the faithful *bhakta* in that form: "You appear in that very form in which they contemplate You, O glorious One" (*Bhāgavata* III.9.11).

Materialistic Religiosity

Given the division of the Purāṇas according to the three *guṇas* noted in the *Matsya* and *Padma Purāṇas* discussed above, the question could now be raised as to why the various Purāṇas and, we can add, Vedic sacred

texts bother to prescribe forms of *bhakti* religiosity to cater to fulfilling the desires of those in *rajas* and *tamas* in the first place. Isn't this sending mixed messages? As with any *yoga* worldview, and indeed (almost) all Indic soteriological systems, the very cause of bondage is desire,¹²⁹ and thus desire must be renounced for liberation to become possible.¹³⁰ So don't scriptural prescriptions catering to fulfilling desire counter the spiritual well-being of those following them and, even worse, do so insidiously since they are embedded in sacred texts and thus claim the aura of being sacrosanct (as Nārada suggests in the Tale of Vyāsa within)? We can also mention here that in addition to the various *bhakti* paths associated with different forms of *Īśvara* in the Purāṇas, the older Vedic texts are laden with prescriptions for rites to the celestial beings (*devas*)¹³¹ promoting various material boons. These rites are also focused on fulfilling desire and require a type of *bhakti* to the *devas* for their fulfillment. Here too the same basic question remains: Since Kṛṣṇa is the *Vedas* (*Gītā* IX.17), and their knower (XV.15), and seems to condone Vedic sacrifice (III.10–14), why did He bother to compose them, only to then urge Arjuna to renounce their “flowery words” (II.42–43)?¹³²

The *Bhāgavata* takes the view that full renunciation of self-centered desire is not (except in occasional grace-related contexts) instantaneous. One needs to gradually progress through the *guṇas* by discipline and sacrifice. As the *Gītā* informs us, this usually takes lifetimes (VI.45). People cannot be expected to renounce desire overnight (*Gītā* III.26). Thus, the religious rites and boons associated with non-*sattva* modes of *bhakti* may indeed be legitimizing the fulfillment of desires, but they nonetheless do so embedded in disciplinary regimens that prescribe the worship of a form of *Īśvara*, or at least of some higher celestial power, and that require some form of discipline and austerity for their accomplishment. We know from the *Yoga Sūtras* that from the performance of discipline (*tapas*), and surrender to *Īśvara* (*praṇidhāna*), the *kleśas*, impurities—including desire—are weakened (II.1–2). By offering various desire-related boons that nonetheless come with this type of discreet price tag, these texts thereby entice those in the lower

guṇas to at least begin this process of discipline and (“mixed”) *bhakti* to some entity higher than themselves, as this will eventually lead toward purification and consequent ultimate well-being. In the words of the *Bhāgavata*: The Vedic utterances conceal their meaning. They prescribe ritual activity (*karma*) for the purpose of becoming free from *karma* just as medicine [is covered by something sweet] for the healing of children. If an ignorant person with uncontrolled senses does not follow the injunctions of the Vedas, he attains death after death [in *saṁsāra*] because of the *adharma* incurred from forbidden actions. The material fruits offered in the Vedas are for the purpose of attracting [people to prescribed actions]. And if one [eventually] follows the prescriptions of the Vedas without attachment, and offers them to *Īśvara*, that person [eventually] attains the perfection of being free from *karma*. (XI.3.44) This, then, can perhaps be considered a form of *upāya*, skillful means: the promise of *prakṛti*-related boons coaxes embodied beings toward *dharma*, righteous actions, that are regulated and connected to higher beings. Thus, one is enticed away from non-*dharma* that will simply perpetuate the lower destinations of *saṁsāra* (even if, as with Vṛka, one starts from a place of *adharma* and deepest *tamas*). Satisfying desires under these regulated conditions, rather than observing no restrictions whatsoever, one begins one’s ascent through the *guṇas*. In time, as one approaches *sattva*, and thus its qualities of insight and wisdom, one eventually realizes one is seeking to overcome suffering by fulfilling desires, but it is actually those very desires themselves that are the *cause* of suffering and bondage (*Gītā* V.22, XIV.17; *Yoga Sūtras* II.15ff.). At this point, renunciation from desire becomes obvious and liberating.

To conclude this section on *Īśvara*, in terms of the most suitable object of *bhakti*, then, the culmination of all these lines of reasoning for the *Bhāgavata* tradition is that “one desiring freedom from fear, should hear about, glorify, and remember Hari, who is *Bhagavān*, *Īśvara*, the soul of everything” (II.1.5). It is Kṛṣṇa, as Ultimate Being, who is ultimately both the source and goal of all religious activity: Vāsudeva [Kṛṣṇa] is the

ultimate goal of the Veda, Vāsudeva is the ultimate goal of ritual sacrifices, Vāsudeva is the ultimate goal of *yoga*, Vāsudeva is the ultimate goal of actions. Vāsudeva is the ultimate goal of knowledge, Vāsudeva is the ultimate goal of austerity (*tapas*), Vāsudeva is the ultimate goal of *dharma*, Vāsudeva is the ultimate goal. (I.2.28–29)¹³³

Or, in the words of the *Gītā*: “After many births, a wise person takes refuge in Me, knowing that ‘Vāsudeva is everything.’ Such a great soul is very rare indeed” (VII.19).

Concluding Reflections

Some Academic Considerations

Readers unfamiliar with Hindu devotion will be struck by how personal the processes of *bhakti* are. That is to say, just as in worldly love affairs in the realm of *prakṛti*, the lover first encounters and feels a seed of attraction for and then ultimately falls in love with the beauty, qualities, acts, personality, and so forth of the beloved, such is the case with *bhakti*. The encounter in the case of *bhakti yoga* occurs between the devoted seeker and one of the multifarious manifestations and activities of *Īśvara* as depicted in the two epics and the vast Purāṇa corpus and its derivative literatures. And this, in Jīva's case, means Kṛṣṇa as encountered in the narratives of His incarnation recorded in the *Bhāgavata*.

A related issue this presents to those unfamiliar with the great Hindu divinities is a corollary of such personal specificity. Western readers, whether with theistic or nontheistic orientations, will in either case usually be responding to Abrahamic notions when envisioning the ultimate nature of God—the portrayals in the monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Jahweh/Jehovah is often construed as a personal but distant and opaque Father-like figure beyond human categories and comprehension (we speak of God the Father here: of course, Jesus, depicted as the son of God, is extremely personal and approachable for Christians). There are references in the Old Testament to prophets who were awarded a personal vision of God the Father,¹

juxtaposed with other references suggesting that God cannot be perceived by humans,² but we are afforded few detailed visuals correlatable with much that is humanly describable (visions typically using the language of fire and splendor, as in Ezekiel 1.1). God remains transcendent to the limitations of human senses and hence concise description (other than through absolutist characteristics such as “almighty,” “all-knowing,” and the like).

There are, in fact, parallels to this in Hinduism. The same tension between special souls being awarded a vision of God and less qualified souls overwhelmed by His majesty being unable to perceive Him even while in His presence occurs in, for example, the *Mokṣadharma* section of the *Mahābhārata* epic (*śānti parva* 336–38).³ Yet whether any individual person is eligible to perceive God or not, the Purāṇas and epics are replete with detailed imagery as to what many of the forms of *Īśvara* and *Īśvarī* are held to look like when manifest to human vision. Indeed, to a great extent these texts owe their own literary *raison d’être* precisely to encoding and preserving the narratives of their incarnations in the world and other such personal involvement with human affairs.

When encountering such Purāṇic and epic depictions of God, which are highly visual and descriptive in language and conceptual structures familiar to the human mind, the default interpretative category most Western readers have at their disposal, and so reflexively draw from so as to make sense of these descriptions, is that of anthropomorphic myth. In other words, the characteristics associated with the various *Īśvara* forms in the Purāṇas are understandably held to constitute a projection of human qualities and activities onto the Supreme Being who is in actuality beyond human comprehension, with some superhuman flourishes to indicate this supremacy. This is all the more so since the cosmographical context of these texts—for example, the world of lower celestials with whom humans interact in various ways—is, in fact, cognate with the Greek, Roman, Celtic, Germanic, and other Indo-European pantheons, as indeed are the gods themselves—whom we have thus far referred to as celestials (*devas* in Sanskrit).⁴

With the spread of monotheistic Christianity, the preexisting Indo-European religions of Europe—including the cognate stories from the Greek, Roman, Germanic, and similarly derived epics, sagas, and other such classical sources—have long been overwhelmed and relegated to the category of classical myth (with some selective appropriations⁵). We are thus challenged, in the *Bhāgavata*, to comprehend the emergence of a theistic tradition, which retains rather than eradicates the cognate theophanies and cosmologies of the old Indo-European world that remain preserved in India and combines these with the manifestation of a monotheistic transcendent Deity. As God the Father Kṛṣṇa claims primal causal dominion and supremacy over everything, a dominion extending most especially over what becomes relegated to lower-level (Indo-European) gods. Indra and the hosts of *devas* do not get brushed aside as “false gods” in Hinduism (or Buddhism, for that matter), but they are relegated to the dimensions of *svarga*, the higher celestial realms of *prakṛti*, although still subject to its laws of *karma* and the temporality of material embodiment. They too are *ātmans* playing out their (exceptionally good) *karma* in the more subtle dimensions of *saṁsāra*.⁶ Their nearest Christian trans-human parallels might be the angels, seraphims, and cherubims (indeed, the winged and musically skilled celestial *gandharvas* are similar in this regard⁷). *Īśvara* is transcendent to these dimensions and their inhabitants,⁸ abiding in what corresponds to the Kingdom of God in the Purāṇas—the transcendent realms of Goloka for Kṛṣṇa, Vaikuṇṭha for Viṣṇu, Śiva-loka for Śiva, and Devī-loka for the Goddess.⁹ This is why the transcendent forms of *Īśvara* should not be confounded with the great Indo-European celestials (gods with a small “g”) or with notions of polytheism, any more than God and His angels express polytheism in the Abrahamic traditions, and why we have stressed that Hinduism’s dominant—by which I intend transregional and pan-Hindu—expressions (other than in the very earliest literary period¹⁰) are either monotheistic (personal) or monistic (nonpersonal).

But most important of all, a further essential feature to keep in mind

if one is to understand the power of *bhakti* is that these transcendent manifestations of *Īśvara* are considered real and actual by their devotees. These Beings are supreme personalities with forms, qualities, and activities eternally existent beyond the realm of physically accessible *prakṛti*. Likewise, the accounts of Their interactions with Their *bhaktas* and incarnations into the world are also not deemed mythological. Myth means not historically true. The stories pertaining to Kṛṣṇa are presented as historically real, not myth by the *Bhāgavata*—as is the case with the *Īśvara* manifestations in the other Purāṇas—and accepted as such by their *bhaktas*. While, as in Christianity, *Īśvara* may send a representative to the world (usually conceived of as an *amśa* or *kalā*, “partial incarnation,” such as Vyāsa,¹¹ rather than as a son figure), God the Father, whom it should be clear by now is identified in the *Bhāgavata* as Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa, Śiva, and, in terms of God the Mother, forms of Devī, the Goddess, can also personally directly appear in the world. This occurs either by these divinities bestowing visions—in the literal sense of manifesting before Their *bhaktas* as visually perceivable presence—as we will find in the Tale of Prince Dhruva—or by assuming forms and entering into the world for prolonged periods resembling a conventional lifetime. This is the *avatāra*, literally “one who descends” (a term problematically translated as “incarnation”).¹² It is the deeds and activities of these *avatāras* performed in the world as recorded in the two epics and the Purāṇas that underpin the devotional practices of most of the major *bhakti* traditions and the bulk of its literary corpus.

So, as we prepare to read parts 2 and 3 of this volume, our main challenge when striving to understand *bhakti* on its own terms is to keep in mind that these stories are not considered myth in premodern India, but sacred history. Purāṇa means “that which occurred in the past,” and, likewise, *itihāsa*, epic, translates as “this is what happened.” Modern theorizing on the study of religion has either imposed reductionistic categories of interpretation on religious narratives of this sort or sought some kind of perennial core. Reductionism entails rejecting the face-value claims made by a tradition, which are seen as expressions of

prerational, prescientific, mythological thinking, and instead strives to impose some modern rational explanation for why religions exist, make the historical claims they do, and wield the power they exert. Their essence is thus “reduced” to some sort of natural, rationally explainable—as opposed to supernatural—cause. Perennialism also rejects the surface-level claims and stories of religious traditions but makes an effort to retain a supernatural element in the form of a common transcultural hidden spiritual core. Like a perennial flower that reappears consistently every year, this core is deemed to surface consistently—“perennially”—across traditions, once one digs behind the clutter of superimposed mythological trappings.

So, for example, in a reductionist approach, a claimed vision of Kṛṣṇa might be interpreted as nothing other than some psychological projections from the subconscious (as with Freud), or the influence of mundane social forces on the psyche (Durkheim and Weber), or concocted by social elite groups to preserve political or economic power over other social groups (Marx). For such theorists, religions are consciously or unconsciously “invented” by humans, created to serve social, political, or psychological purposes or other such mundane needs in the real world.¹³ Perennialism, in contrast, which is prepared to allow a spiritual core to religious phenomenon and resists such materialistic reductionism, ends up imposing a reductionism of its own. Although committed to acknowledging some transcendent element to religion, perennialists typically jettison all surface-layer narratives (such as the stories of the activities of *Īśvara*’s incarnations) in the quest of some perennial core buried beneath them. This core is deemed to emerge consistently across religions, irrespective of time and place, once excavated by the perennialist savant. It is typically construed as some form of a monistic essence—understandably, as monism is the most conveniently appropriated metaphysics for anyone seeking a baseline generic commonality from the comparison of religions. The stories themselves are deemed later accretions added as concessions for the unenlightened superstitious masses, or are at best accepted as metaphor,

symbol, or archetype of some higher Truth.¹⁴ All this is an enormous domain in its own right, foundational to, and indeed constitutive of, the academic study of religion, but for our present purposes, both these types of treatments violate the claims such texts make about themselves, albeit in very different ways and underpinned by opposing intentions. (Strenski, 2006, likes to call the “perennialists” “caretakers of religion,” and reductionists “undertakers of religion”!) In any event, as something of a reaction against such interpretative impositions from the elite ivory towers of Western scholarship on non-Western traditions, with many of these theories reflecting the Eurocentric, Christian, colonial, and racist attitudes of their times,¹⁵ an academic approach to the study of religion, called “phenomenology,” emerged among certain intellectuals. Despite meaning different things to different scholars in the history of the term, phenomenology typically strives to refrain from imposing Western post-Enlightenment so-called rational modes of interpretation on the truth claims of other traditions, often far distant in space, time, and context, and strives, rather, to consider them on their own terms. This approach does not entail necessarily accepting traditional claims as historically or scientifically true, but it does entail making at least a serious commitment to bracketing one’s own beliefs and presuppositions (even as this is impossible). It attempts to suspend judgments of veracity or falsity and refrains from evaluating traditions based on their compatibility with modern categories of knowledge. This is intended to allow the traditions to narrate their own tale and speak in their own voice through their own categories as “phenomena” in their own right. This is the approach I have adopted throughout, as outlined in the introduction.

If we wish to gain any level of empathy, phenomenological or other, as to the power of *bhakti*, it is useful to keep in mind that nowhere in the sixteen thousand verses of the *Bhāgavata* does the text claim to be myth, metaphor, or symbol. Nor is any such suggestion made in the approximately four hundred thousand verses of the entire Purāṇa corpus, the one-hundred-thousand-verse *Mahābhārata*, and the twenty-

four-thousand-verse *Rāmāyaṇa*. In fact, when metaphoric readings are intended, they are clearly indicated, as we will see in the Allegory of the Forest and the Allegory of King Purañjana in part 2.¹⁶ Thanks to the intellectual conditionings we have inherited from post-Enlightenment presuppositions (another vast and interminable topic in its own right), we would do well to be aware of our own cultural presuppositions and intellectual embeddedness and bear in mind that most modern heirs to the Western Enlightenment do not read these stories in the same way the tradition-sensitive *bhaktas* do.

Ultimately, this is an epistemological issue. Epistemology deals with the sources and means through which knowledge is acquired. Briefly stated, prior to the Enlightenment, the Christian Bible had been deemed the ultimate source of knowledge in most mainstream contexts in Christendom for the best part of a millennium and a half (despite its many dissenters). The Enlightenment displaced scripture in favor of human reason as the highest source of knowledge. The “light” of reason was deemed epistemologically paramount. Despite dissenters here too, we now inhabit an intellectual world where the claims of scripture are subject to the scrutiny of reason and empirical data, at least in most scholarly circles. Even as most thinkers in academic circles are fully aware of the myth of objectivity and the limitations of reason and the empirical method, they are still considered the *de facto* safest epistemological methods. Few are willing to countenance a return to what most would consider a faith-based, nondemonstrable, magical, superstitious, mythological worldview inhabited by invisible beings and controlled by supernatural forces. (Although, increasingly, with some scientists talking of parallel universes and other such phenomena, the Purāṇic cosmography can sometimes seem a little less “mythic” in comparison!) Where the modern West has prioritized reason and empiricism¹⁷ as the highest reliable source of knowledge since its “enlightenment,” other cultures such as those of India have not had the same conflict between religion and science and the tension inherited from the subsequent separation of these two domains, at least

historically. Let us keep in mind that the Christian context that triggered this separation was a European affair. The Western Enlightenment assumption that the ultimacy of reason is a universal and absolute given will be challenged by anyone open to understanding most *mokṣa* traditions of India on their own terms, and certainly the *Bhāgavata* tradition. While developing a rich array of highly sophisticated reason-based intellectual systems,¹⁸ these traditions have often marshaled these in support of transrational and supraempirical realities. And the existence of these realities frequently rests on the authority of sacred texts (see the *Vedānta Sūtras* I.1.3) and/or on the accounts of rugged *yogī* exemplars. The authoritativeness of such *yogīs*, in turn, rests on their own claims to direct personal experience that is “transempirical” (*para-pratyakṣa*).¹⁹ Yoga’s very definition is to experience states of consciousness beyond the intellect, announced by Patañjali in the very opening verses of his *sūtras* (I.1–4).

Thus the practices and appeal of *bhakti* will make no sense—or at least no sense recognizable to traditional Vaiṣṇavas—unless we recognize the fact that these texts locate themselves as sacred history—records of the superhuman deeds and arrangements enacted by the supreme *Īśvara* when He broke into human time and space or, in the opening words of the tenth book, “the deeds performed by the Almighty Lord, the Creator of the Universe, when He incarnated” (I.2–3). We can take this or leave it: our task, established at the onset, is simply to present the Truth claims of the *Bhāgavata* tradition in its own terms to the best of our abilities, not to attempt to influence how the reader chooses to make sense of them. We trust it is eminently clear by now that the central feature of those claims is that—to once again borrow some phraseology in order to stress the universalism as opposed to the “Hindu-ness” of the claim—Kṛṣṇa is God the Father for the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. And the text’s tenth book we will encounter in part 3 claims to be a record of His deeds when He descended on earth.

So, as we have seen from the nine processes of *bhakti yoga*, in essence, *bhakti* is nothing other than becoming attracted to these deeds, hearing

them, remembering them, reciting them, enacting them in drama and festivals, commemorating them at the times of year they occurred, undertaking pilgrimage to the places made holy by their activities, worshipping them through temple mediums, and other such immersive ritual practices. In advanced stages, one becomes so absorbed and enamored by these stories that one loses interest in everything else—that is, everything pertaining to *prakṛti* (as with the ultimate stage of detachment of *Yoga Sūtras* I.16).²⁰ The same holds true for the other *bhakti* traditions based on other manifestations of *Īśvara*. So there we have it: when all is said and done, this is what *bhakti yoga* is, not just in Jīva’s tradition, but in almost all premodern *bhakti* traditions. The metaphysical differences and variants outlined in the previous section notwithstanding, most forms of *bhakti* are predicated on accepting some sort of reality to a form of *Īśvara* or *Īśvarī* and commemorating His or Her associated qualities and deeds.

In sum, while the historicity of Kṛṣṇa might be the glaring anomaly in all of this from a rationalist point of view (the elephant in the room, so to speak), to understand the appeal of *bhakti* to its followers, it serves to keep in mind that these stories are not considered myth. They are as true to the *bhaktas* as the narratives of the Old Testament, New Testament, and Koran are to the faithful of the various Abrahamic monotheistic traditions. For the *bhaktas*, if there is an almighty *Īśvara*, then that *Īśvara* can surely enter into the world and manipulate *prakṛti* to perform astonishing deeds irrespective of what our finite minds and limited knowledge systems might care to say about it. For the *Bhāgavata*, what else is the meaning of words such as “infinite,” “unlimited,” and “almighty”? In fact, such confounding of our human rational capabilities to comprehend these deeds or pigeonhole them into familiar human empirically based epistemic categories is not only self-evident, but a source of great relish for the devotee: “Just as an ignorant person does not understand the behavior of an actor, so no creature of limited intelligence can understand through words, mind, or cleverness, the pastimes of the Supreme Creator when He exhibits His names and forms”

(I.3.37).

Having said all that, I would venture to speculate that even for most modern educated *bhaktas*, schooled in the intellectual currents flowing from Western post-Enlightenment thought, whether or not the fabulous events pertaining to Kṛṣṇa's incarnation *actually* happened in verifiable historical time and space is less important than relishing the meditation that if *Īśvara* is unlimited and omnipotent, as all theists hold Him to be, then any or all events featuring Him such as those we will encounter in part 3 certainly *could* have happened simply as an expression of His divine will. While one cannot renegotiate the fact that the text clearly presents itself as passing down historical records of *Īśvara*'s divine descents, it nonetheless identifies its main purpose in its very opening verses as conveying *rasa*, love of God. It is the experience of this *rasa* that is of interest to *bhaktas*, not the laborious minutiae of historical reconstruction: The literature, which reveals the qualities of *Bhagavān*, is literature that is true, that is auspicious, that is purifying. It is such literature, which is pleasing and charming and which always provides an ever-fresh joyful experience for the mind. It is such literature which dries up the ocean of despair for all people—the literature wherein the glories of Kṛṣṇa are recited ... *even if there are errors in every line*. (XII.12.48–51, my italics) The *Bhāgavata* is signing on to being a venue for transmitting a beautiful vision of God as its ultimate *raison d'être*. The insistence on historicity that can be empirically verified via archaeology, linguistics, numismatics, text criticism, and so forth has emerged since the European Enlightenment as a response to intellectual dynamics, tensions, and developments in Christendom in response to the historical claims of its textual traditions.²¹ That these methods and ways of thinking have been exported and seemingly universalized is a feature of past European colonialism and present Western economic and political power,²² but they may not always be so relevant or share the same importance with what is central to the *bhakta*'s experience.²³

But the fact is, post-Enlightenment modes and methods of evaluating

sacred histories have been exported and they have been made de facto normative, at least in academic centers of learning. And it is also a fact that the monotheistic traditions of Hindu *bhakti* such as Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, centered on the historicity of Kṛṣṇa's incarnation (as that of Rāma and the other *avatāras*), have much more of a challenge engaging modern scientific methods of historical reconstruction than the monistic traditions. It was the incompatibility of biblical chronology and the Genesis narratives of the Old Testament with the emerging historical methods of geology, archaeology, linguistics, and text criticism (as well as the encounter with non-European civilizations) that lay at the heart of the Enlightenment and spawned the academic study of religion in the first place. Monistic traditions such as *advaita Vedānta*, while nonetheless certainly accepting the Purāṇa accounts as historical and literally true in the realm of conventional reality discussed previously (*vyavahārika*—that is, true to the same extent pots, pans, mountains, stars in the sky, and any other perceivable phenomenon are true and real), consider them ultimately all illusory, *māyā*, on the level of absolute reality (*pāramārthika*). There is a bit less at stake here. Monotheistic Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, as we know, revolves around the deeds performed by a real *Īśvara* in real human space and time, just as normative Christianity depends on the reality of a historical Christ. Such centrality of the historical dimension is much less negotiable and so is much more challenged by modernity.²⁴

Pertinent here is that centuries before the challenges introduced by the Western juxtaposition of myth versus history during the colonial period impacted Hindu intellectuals, Jīva had outlined in his *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* that Kṛṣṇa's *līlā* has a divine counterpart, which is eternally enacted in a trans-*prakṛtic* *Brahman* dimension. This *Brahman* realm, Goloka, coexists with this earthly realm but is inaccessible to sensual perception and rational thought (*anu* 106, 110–16, 153, 172).²⁵ It can, however, be accessed by advanced *bhāgavatas* in deep states of *samādhi* (as we encountered in the passages from Caitanya's life). So while Kṛṣṇa's *līlā* is certainly held to be a historical event in the *Bhāgavata*,

Jīva also finds ground in the text itself to suggest that the *līlās* are simultaneously always transpiring in this eternal, coexisting, non-*prakṛtic* counterpart. While Goloka is beyond the range of empiricism and human reason, it is nonetheless a realm that is coextensive with this realm of *prakṛti* and hence can be experienced in this world in *bhakti samādhī*, as we have seen.

Indeed, while Hindu responses to modernity are an enormous topic in their own right, we can briefly note that a much later representative of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, Bhaktivinoda Thakur, in the nineteenth century, availed himself of this alternative spiritual reality when confronted with the empirical methods of historical reconstruction reaching the Hindu intelligentsia of his time from the West.²⁶ As a high court judge in colonial India and very much an early apologist for the Kṛṣṇa tradition responding to the challenges of modernity, Bhaktivinoda separated what he called the *ādhunika-vāda*, “modern approach” to the study of scripture, from its *paramārtha-prada*,²⁷ “transcendent aspect.” The sphere of historical authority of the *ādhunika-vāda* pertains to the text’s references to space and historical time, which could be subject to the scrutiny of empirical methodologies and consequently tinkered with and, if necessary, readily adjusted in response to modern historical methods. The *paramārtha-prada*, on the other hand, is the divine dimension of Kṛṣṇa’s *līlā*, beyond *prakṛti*, and hence immune to the intellect and senses, but, following Jīva, a realm experientially accessible by deep *bhakti*. In this way, Bhaktivinoda strove to safeguard the claims of the *bhakta* mystics from the threatening deconstructive dismantling of Western methodologies of historical reconstruction (unlike some of his contemporaries and successors who were much more willing to completely jettison the *Bhāgavata* Kṛṣṇa and the Purāṇas in general in their determination to find modes of monotheism in Hinduism that could pass—and surpass—the standards set by Western moral and rational discourse²⁸).

In fact, revisionist readings of older texts go back to the middle Vedic period. Already in the *Brāhmaṇas*, *Āraṇyakas*, and Upaniṣads, mystical

interpretations of the Vedic rites become increasingly evident (see, for example, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* I.1), as do naturalistic interpretation of Vedic myths.²⁹ Commenting on the oldest Vedic material, the twelfth-century theologian Madhva identified his own three different ways of reading the *Ṛg-Veda*: the historical, the mystical, and the transcendent.³⁰ Jīva himself notes that the *Bhāgavata* can instruct in three different moods: either as a master, or as friend, or as the beloved (*Tattva Sandarbha* XXVI.2). A later exegete of the same school, Viśvanātha, uses another triple lens: the *Bhāgavata* contains three progressive levels of content. On a generic level, it is like the light, shining knowledge on the soul, in accordance with the older *ātman* traditions; beyond this, it is like the sun (a greater source of light), illuminating the superexcellence of Kṛṣṇa as the Ultimate Truth; and, highest of all, it is the ripe fruit of bliss. While this highest third phase breaks the luminosity metaphor, it surpasses the other two ways of reading the text insofar as it deals with experience rather than just providing knowledge.³¹ In fact, it is to promote this experience of love of God that is the ultimate goal of the *Bhāgavata*.

While these traditional theologians mean rather different things by their respective schemas, present-day readers may thus find themselves following a well-worn path of tripartite hermeneutics. Most modern lenses may also very well view the text as containing three distinct levels that correspond to our own intellectual milieu: a historical core preserving records of royal dynasties and kingdoms; a mythological overlay involving a world of various levels of divine beings and superhuman mortals and their fabulous deeds; and a theological one representing the emergence of a powerful monotheistic tradition drawing from a *yogic* backdrop and centered on the worship of Śrī Kṛṣṇa that was to sweep across the subcontinent. In any event, clearly the *Bhāgavata* offers profound insights into the human condition that transcend time, place, and the vicissitudes of the ever-changing empirical and rational knowledge systems pertaining to material reality. For those interested in the wisdom traditions for their insights into the

nature of the mind and its workings, or guidance into what might constitute the higher goals of life, one is perfectly entitled to extract the *yoga* teachings of the *Bhāgavata* from their larger social, scientific, historical, cosmological, and related contexts, just as one does with insights of the great Greek philosophers, who, after all, navigated within the contours of a cognate cosmography. In fact, those familiar with the *Bhāgavata* may notice we have favored precisely such *yogic/jñāna* (wisdom) narratives in our selections in part 2. The tales and teachings here can certainly be read from the point of view of the psychological, philosophical, and soteriological messages they impart over and beyond the surface narratives.

In fact, there are numerous instances of premodern Indian thinkers proposing alternative or nonliteral readings of sections or elements in the *Purāṇas* without rejecting them as authoritative texts. The later astronomers come to mind, who accepted the observation-based data of the later *Sūrya Siddhānta* (astronomical) traditions without overtly rejecting the very different cosmological accounts in the much older *Purāṇas*. Likewise, and of great relevance here, strains of the Sanskrit literary tradition theorized about when indirect signification is to be applied to a passage where a literal reading is rendered impossible by other knowledge systems.³²

In fact, one can find instances of the *Bhāgavata* itself offering opportunities for nonliteral readings. In the twelfth book, for example, Viṣṇu's *kaustubha* gem is said to represent the *ātman*; his flower garland, the *guṇas*; his yellow garment, the Vedic meter; his sacred thread, the syllable *om*; his club, *prāṇa*, the life airs; the various implements he holds in his hands, the elements; his bow, Time; and so on for a number of verses (XII.11.10–20). All this is not to say that the text is renegotiating the ontological reality of these items, but, rather, that it does not appear to be threatened by nonliteral readings for those conditioned by and subject to rational modes of thinking. Along similar lines, after describing the various realms of the universe in book 5, the text concludes by specifying that these cosmographic descriptions are

intended to bring the mind to contemplating *Īśvara* through His “material” perceivable form of creation. This is the God of natural theology. Once the mind has become proficient in this, and purified simply by dint of contemplating *Īśvara* in whatever mode this takes in accordance with the mental predisposition of a person, then one “should lead the mind to the subtle form of *Bhagavān*” (V.26.38–40; see also II.2.14). In other words, contemplating the wondrous realms of the universe as God’s body is first and foremost a method to develop *bhakti*. In the same way, the descriptions of king lineages “have been narrated with the intention of expressing detachment from and insight into [the temporal nature of material grandeur]. They are just a display of rhetoric, they are not the Ultimate Truth” (XII.3.14–15). It is not the minutiae of dates, historicality, geography, or cosmology, etc., that interests the *Bhāgavata* but revealing the fleeting nature of even the grandest material accomplishments and conquests. The text’s central claim and *raison d’être* is that if one absorbs one’s mind in the stories pertaining to Kṛṣṇa and His amazing deeds, one will speedily and easily attain the generic qualifications of *yoga* (dispassion toward the world of sense objects and the like) and develop an experience of love of God. What the rational mind may make of the stories is secondary to this effect.

So although the *Bhāgavata* from its opening verses on unambiguously situates itself as simultaneously sacred and temporal history, it does not demand that one is required to accept this claim for the stories to perform their function. In fact, as was discussed in “Meditation in Hate and Lust,” the text takes some pains to describe how various individuals who could never accept the transcendent factuality of Kṛṣṇa as claimed by the *Bhāgavata* tradition nonetheless attained the goals of *bhakti* by dint of immersing their minds in thoughts of Him, some in hatred and with violent intent.³³ The stories ultimately seek to implant a seed of *rāga*, love of God, embedded in the larger generic *yoga* context of stressing the futility of pursuing any other self-centered *prakṛtic rāga*. If one attains this *bhakti rāga*, irrespective of how one interprets the stories

—literally, metaphorically, symbolically, or, as with Bhaktivinoda, esoterically—then the *Bhāgavata* has attained its ultimate goals.

In any event, returning to the ontological status of these forms of *Īśvara* and *Īśvarī*, to perhaps underscore the fact that acceptance of their reality is not part of some classical mythic traditions of the premodern past but very much part of a living tradition, we might just mention in passing that a number of modern-day *gurus* have claimed (or were recorded by their disciples as claiming) to have had visions of all forms of *Īśvara*. Focusing just on claims pertaining to Kṛṣṇa, and from Hindu figures well-known in the West, the hagiography of Rāmakrishna, Vivekānanda's *guru*, records his visions of Kṛṣṇa.³⁴ One of the most influential *gurus* of modern India (and, through his disciples, in the West), Śivānanda, writes in the first line of his autobiography of his vision of Kṛṣṇa.³⁵ His disciple, too, Vishnudevananda, who established the Śivānanda Organization in his *guru*'s name, claimed to have had a vision of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa in a place that he consequently purchased as a result and developed as the organization's Grass Valley, California, *āśrama*.³⁶ Aurobindo, the remarkable freedom fighter turned mystic, had a vision of Kṛṣṇa while imprisoned.³⁷ Iyengar, whose influence in the spread of *āsana*, modern postural *yoga*, has been immense (but, as we have noted, who still maintains identification with Rāmānuja's Śrī Vaiṣṇava Vedānta lineage), when young and struggling to maintain his family in the days before *yoga* became a global phenomenon told his disciples that Viṣṇu appeared to him in a dream and told him that he should continue with his commitment to this path and that all his difficulties would be resolved.³⁸ Amma, "the Hugging Mother" (Mata Amritanandamayi), had visions of Kṛṣṇa in her youth.³⁹ Yogananda Paramahansa reports a vision of Kṛṣṇa in his autobiography.⁴⁰ We can also note that while not identifying this being as Kṛṣṇa (but rather as Śiva), but along similar lines, Muktānanda describes a vision of a blue boy in his remarkable autobiography (along with a prior vision of a form of *Īśvarī*).⁴¹

These are just samples of claims to visions of Kṛṣṇa from very recent

famous *guru* figures who became well-known in the West. There are countless other claims to visions of other forms of *Īśvara* (for example, the famous mathematician Śrīnivāsa Rāmāṇujan claimed not only to have had visions of a form of the Goddess Nāmagiri Tāyār, but to have received many complex equations from her). Obviously they are all anecdotal and hagiographical, but whatever we may choose to make of them, and whatever alternative (typically post-Freudian) explanations we may prefer to adopt in order to fit them into our intellectual comfort zones, claims to visions of all the various forms of *Īśvara* and *Īśvarī* are ubiquitous throughout the history of Indian culture from the late Vedic age till the present. In short, *bhakti* texts all claim that *Īśvara* can be seen by the sincere and fully dedicated devotee (see *Gītā* XI.54 for an example of this), and however we in the so-called rational West may opt to interpret these assertions, and whatever reductionistic interpretations we may prefer to impose on them, the point we are making here is simply that *bhakti yoga* very much remains a living tradition and, as with other mystical traditions, one that lays its claims to verification in direct personal experience. Our Western “enlightenment” and the historical factors that triggered its intellectual trajectory are clearly drawing from a very different set of epistemological experiences and presuppositions from the “enlightened” traditions long current in India.

Be all this as it may, our own methodological approach in this volume has been phenomenological—allowing the *Bhāgavata* to tell its own story and make its own truth claims both in its own voice and through the lenses applied to it by the later tradition represented by Jīva and Rūpa. We have avoided imposing any external modern interpretative models upon its meanings and significance; our task, established immediately and clearly at the beginning of the introduction, has been to offer the interested reader a glimpse into one universe of traditional *bhakti* prior to its encounter with modernity, not to attempt to influence how the modern reader should make sense of it all. Of course, from the perspective of *bhakti* practitioners, it remains to be seen what forms transplanted *bhakti yoga* will take among the various *yoga* communities

in the West. We have seen what has happened to the radical world/body/mind-renouncing asceticism of Patañjalian Yoga in its appropriation by and commodification into what has better been called “modern postural yoga” in many expressions of practice laying claim to that tradition, at least in name.⁴² Even then, for those who do in fact engage classical yoga philosophy on its own terms, the basic conceptual commitment it requires—that consciousness can be removed from all objects and withdrawn into its own nature (I.3)—is a lot less demanding than the leap of faith central to the *Bhāgavata*. Although the dualism of, say, Plato and normative Christianity is different from that of Yoga,⁴³ some sort of a mind/body dualism has remained if not hegemonic, certainly the dominant view in most Western intellectual traditions throughout recorded history. And even as a neurological view of consciousness now has a strong following among some communities of scientists, and the Cartesian variant of dualism has long faced various philosophical challenges, the notion of consciousness being distinct from the body is still very much a defensible and certainly a culturally familiar belief.

The point here is that a non-*bhakta* can engage (much of⁴⁴) the *Yoga Sūtras* and still feel connected to familiar cultural, theological, and intellectual landmarks. The *Bhāgavata*, if taken on its own terms—that the forms and manifestations of *Īśvara* are real transcendent Beings and their wonderful deeds factually enacted in human time and space—is clearly demanding a much more drastic conceptual leap of faith from the perspective of reality as construed not only by our modern intellectual and scientific traditions, but by the Western world’s historically religious ones. This is a leap that, from the point of view of the Western literary tradition, finds its closest cognate in a Greco-Roman past that has been long eclipsed and relegated to the realm of myth. Such a leap is obviously expecting a lot.

There is thus every reason to suppose that in its efforts to establish roots on the landscape of transplanted Eastern spirituality, *bhakti* will develop even more radically reconfigured meanings and expressions

from its traditional genealogies than generic *yoga* has done. And it, too, while hopefully still attracting practitioners committed to the worldview of the traditional sources, will in all likelihood continue to be seen as another source of Eastern material that provides further ingredients for the pick-and-choose, mix-and-match approach typical of modern watered-down Western spiritualities. (By “watered-down,” I partly intend that the *tapas*, austerity/discipline, so central to all Indic *mokṣa* traditions tends to get, if not jettisoned, significantly diluted in the New Age alternative religious landscape.) Even if this is so, independent of the cosmological, historical, and social context within which it situates itself, and the *Īśvara*-centered theism that is its all-pervading *raison d’être*, it is hard to deny that at its most basic level in terms of generic *yoga* teachings, the *Bhāgavata* offers powerful insights into the human condition and the nature of the mind that will always remain perennially relevant to human beings of any time and place.

Whatever future awaits them, the stories of Kṛṣṇa and the other forms of *Īśvara* have a power of their own that, as we know from the preceding discussions, can plant a seed of attraction for this mischievous figure, but one that does not always sit comfortably with the rational mind. On a personal note, as an academic committed to the ideals of objective intellectual rigor and integrity, who has nonetheless devoted his life to this tradition, I can attest that these tensions are irresolvable, as perhaps they should be. The dance between reason and the heart is never-ending—sometimes causing one to sway and veer toward one modality, sometimes the other. One can remain in a state of dissonance about this, or one can simply become comfortable wearing different hats appropriate to the different *dharmas*, or domains: the *dharma* of objective, historical, contextual analysis as required by academia, and the *dharma* as defined by the *Bhāgavata* discussed previously—the subjective, ahistorical, and transcontextual devotion to a Supreme Being. These *dharmic* spheres require different theoretical languages, vocabularies, conceptual structures, methodologies, and associations of participants. One can navigate between them without needing to resolve

their tensions and disjunctions—and, indeed, recognize the impossibility of ever doing so. By definition, transrational transempirical states and experiences are metaphysically and epistemologically incompatible with rational methods of empirical analysis and verification—a very well-worn and persistent topic in the study of religion. The *Bhāgavata* repeatedly claims that Kṛṣṇa's attractive qualities supersede and flout all intellectual, social, cultural, and similar considerations.

However, apologetics can go only so far: at the end of the day, for the *bhakti* traditions to remain living worldviews with positive relevance to the intellectual communities of their times, especially in their transplanted forms outside of India, they will increasingly have to engage the challenges of modernity, even given the epistemological disjunction noted above, just as Christian thinkers have done for almost two centuries. Vaiṣṇava theologians have historically invested great intellectual energy in presenting their theologies in as rational and philosophically rigorous a manner as possible—and in dialogue with the scholarly currents of their day and age (as is the theologian's *dharma* in any time and place). They have addressed opposing viewpoints incompatible with their essential premises (the *pūrvapakṣa*) with integrity and confidence. Continuing that process has barely begun, given the still very recently transplanted nature of *bhakti* in the West, and it remains to be seen what forms this might take. These traditions have only just begun to produce public intellectuals adequately equipped academically to engage in scholarly dialogue—in conversation both with other monotheisms in particular as well as the broader comparative field of religion on one side and with modern science and the scientific method on the other.⁴⁵ There is good reason (see Edelman 2014) to suppose these fledgling but very commendable efforts will continue and increase. And one would like to hope that the orthodox *paṇḍits* and *ācāryas*, the bearers of the traditional Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta *saṁpradāyas* (lineages), will also be inspired to engage the intellectual currents of their present time in a more active and public manner than has hitherto been the case, either personally or by inspiring their

followers who have the requisite scholarly credentials to do so. In doing so, they would thereby follow in the footsteps of their predecessors who have always stalwartly risen to the occasion over the centuries—indeed, over the two millennia—before them.⁴⁶

But, ultimately, when everything is said and done, *bhakti* is about love of God, and that is a matter of the heart⁴⁷ that lays claim to a transrational domain. This may not always be reconcilable with what constitutes reality as reconstructed by the intellect using the methods of empiricism and human reason. In the end, one's interpretative partialities and modes of making sense of what is going on with these stories reflect how comfortable one is with this dichotomy and what one accepts as one's ultimate source of epistemological authority (which is a matter of faith, whatever episteme ones prioritizes). And, perhaps more ultimate still from a *bhakti* perspective, one might even suggest that one's position on such things in turn reflects the depth, or absence, of one's personal *bhakti rāga* and nothing else.

Hierarchies of Bliss

Let us now, by way of conclusion, return to the frames of reference and categories of the *Bhagavata* itself, which has been our commitment in this project all along, and summarize the implications of everything we have discussed from the perspective of *yoga* in general. As we have seen, one of the main subtexts of the *Bhāgavata* and its derivative literature such as the *Sandarbhas* is to repeatedly contrast the bliss of a personal relationship between *Īśvara* and the *bhakta* with the experience of impersonal, nonrelational *ātman/Brahman* immersion. We have used the language of monotheism and monism for these modalities—but we should mention that they will often be encountered in theological texts as *saguṇa Brahman*, the Absolute Truth with personality, form, and qualities, and *nirguṇa Brahman*, formless and qualityless Truth (as in III.32.36). We have discussed how, according to *Bhāgavata* ontology (and mainstream Hinduism in general), *prakṛti* is an active dynamic, sensual, personalized, and object-focused realm of reality, in which the *ātman* is

embedded. Beyond this is the passive, nondynamic, trans-sensual, impersonal, and subject-centered⁴⁸ dimension of reality, consisting of the experience of the *ātman*, a state synonymous with *Brahman* immersion, where consciousness is absorbed in its own nature. Beyond this again, there is another active, dynamic, sensual, personal, and object-focused realm of reality, but in this case made not of temporal unconscious *prakṛti* stuff, but of eternal conscious *Brahman* stuff, the realms of Vaikuṇṭha and Goloka. The liberated *ātmans* attaining these realms again become reembodied, but this time not in a *prakṛtic* form in which suffering is constitutional and endemic, but in an eternal body made of pure *sat-cit-ānanda Brahman*—a divine form made of being and consciousness in which bliss is inherent and ever-expanding.

Therefore, given that in the Vedānta and Purāṇa traditions, from the earliest Upaniṣads and through practically the entire history of late Vedic-derived literature onward, there is little disagreement that the *ātman* is eternal and conscious⁴⁹ (with the partial exception of the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣikā traditions),⁵⁰ one's options, therefore, are merely of what it is that one ends up being conscious or aware. In other words, since it can never be not conscious or not aware, owing to its eternal unchanging nature, the *ātman*'s essential inherent constitution requires that it be conscious of something for all eternity, so what is it that awareness ends up being aware of? For as long as we are embodied, the instrument utilized by consciousness when seeking any object of awareness is the mind, so, put differently, what is it that we are going to do with this mind, as it is never inactive in the waking state (other than in the states of *samādhi*)?

In embodied existence, fueled by objects of desire, awareness is focused primarily on the sensations produced by these objects through the instruments of the mind and sense organs, all provided by *prakṛti* in accordance with those desires.⁵¹ Upon realizing that it is this very quest for sensual pleasure that is itself the fundamental cause of suffering, one may seek to renounce desire, transcend its *karmic* consequences and hence suffering, and realize the true source of consciousness freed from

its ensnarement with *prakṛti* and all objects.⁵² Gaining success in this, one attains *nirbīja samādhi*, a passive state of self-awareness⁵³—that is to say, the object of awareness becomes awareness itself, although, put more precisely, the subject/object duality evaporates and pure objectless consciousness is all that remains. But if, as described earlier, one encounters and becomes attracted to the object of consciousness called *Īśvara*—that is if, while embodied, one happens to hear about *Īśvara*'s names, qualities, forms, deeds, and so on by having the good fortune to encounter the *Bhāgavata* or the *bhāgavatas*—one might become attracted to developing a relationship with this Being. For this, awareness again needs the instruments of mind and senses—whether made of *prakṛti* in this world or of *Brahman* stuff in the Goloka realm—in order to see, hear, think about, and interact with Kṛṣṇa. Thus, as we have discussed, after hearing about Kṛṣṇa, even *jñānis* who have realized their own *ātman* may decide to reconnect with the psychophysical mechanism of the mind and senses so as to dive into the ocean of Hari's *līlās*.

So for the *Bhāgavata*, consciousness has three basic options: to be absorbed in *prakṛti*, to be absorbed in itself, or to be absorbed in devotional thoughts and loving service of *Īśvara*. We might wish to note here that any process of *yoga* is taking place in the mind. The mind is nothing other than a storage container (*āśaya*) for *saṁskāras*. Both *bhoga* (*prakṛtic* enjoyment) and all forms of *yoga* are ultimately enacted by the *saṁskāras* of the mind. In conventional life in the world, when ignorant of the self, the prominent *saṁskāra* in the mind is *prakṛtic rāga*, desire; the goal of life is *bhoga*, pleasure; and everything else is processed in terms of its value to the fulfillment of *rāga*. The *jñāna yoga* path for those frustrated with *bhoga* involves fixing the mind on the teachings of the Upaniṣads or other such knowledge texts pertaining to the ultimacy of the *ātman* and the temporality of *prakṛti*. This boils down to keeping the *ātman saṁskāra* as the dominant *saṁskāra* or presence in the mind, which monitors all other *saṁskāras*, ensuring they are in line with thoughts pertaining to *mokṣa*, the ultimate goal of *jñāna*. *Dhyāna yoga* (Patañjalian-type *yoga*) involves the ultimate suppression of all states of

mind whatsoever, so the practice here is to keep the *nirodha* (suppressing) *saṁskāra* reigning supreme and suppressing any other *saṁskāra* that might try to make its presence felt (I.50–51). And *bhakti* involves keeping thoughts of one’s beloved *Īśvara* foremost in the mind, and of one’s *vaidhī* or *rāgānugā* relationship with Him, hence the *Īśvara saṁskāra* is dominant in this practice. But whether one is cultivating the *prakṛtic rāga saṁskāra*, the *ātman saṁskāra*, the *nirodha saṁskāra*, or the *Īśvara saṁskāra*, these are all *saṁskāras* and therefore all states of mind. Bottom line: We get to choose which set of *saṁskāras* we wish to pursue in life.

In ultimate postmortem liberation, as I trust is clear by now, the *bhakta* seeks to replace the mind made of *prakṛti* stuff with one made of *Brahman* stuff, but in any circumstance one still needs a mind to perform *bhakti*, and mind is not inherent in the *ātman*, it is an external covering (*Gītā* VII.4). So until attaining a *Brahman* mind (and senses) in *Vaikuṇṭha* or *Goloka* in the postmortem state, for as long as *bhaktas* remain embodied in *prakṛti*, they choose to retain the mind and senses made of *prakṛti* so as to contemplate and actively serve their beloved *Īśvara*, rather than uncouple from the mind and remain in a state of pure but passive consciousness, as per standard Patañjalian-type *yoga* practice. Ultimately, why some *yogīs* would abandon the state of *ātman* immersion, promoted as enormously blissful in the Upaniṣads,⁵⁴ and hence the goal of so many *jñāna* and *yoga* traditions, so as to again reconnect with their minds, after so much hard work detaching themselves from these very minds as the source of suffering, is very simple. Channeling consciousness through the mind, intellect, and senses onto *Īśvara* is simply incomparably more blissful than any other experience in existence, including that of the bliss, *ānanda*, inherent in the *ātman*: “The pleasure [experienced] by embodied beings from meditating on Your lotus feet or from hearing about Your deeds from Your devotees does not exist in *Brahman*, even though that is also a part of Your own majesty, O Lord” (IV.9.10).

Therefore, in all this, we find a difference among the various Hindu

soteriological (*mokṣa*) traditions with regard to liberation—even as all agree that this is a state beyond suffering. Let us compare some of them in this regard (leaving aside the Cārvāka/Lokāyata-grouped materialist schools that do not accept any postmortem liberation).⁵⁵ The Nyāya and Vaiśeṣikā schools hold that the liberated state, which they also accept as uncoupling the *ātman* from the mind (*manas*), is simply one of *sat*, being.⁵⁶ For these schools, there is not even consciousness, *cit*, in *mokṣa*, as this is a quality that emerges only when the *ātman* is connected with the instrumentality of the mind in *saṁsāra*. Nor, certainly, is there *ānanda*; there is just unconscious being. The soteriological goal of *yoga* here, *mokṣa*, is freedom from suffering (*Nyāya Sūtras* I.1.2, 9, 22), not some beatific state of bliss, and this freedom is attained by not activating the presence of consciousness altogether in the liberated state.

Sāṅkhya and classical Yoga, in their attempt to attain a state beyond suffering, go a step further: while these schools accept that the liberated state consists of *sat*, being,⁵⁷ they differ from Nyāya in also assigning *cit*, consciousness, to *mokṣa*. Thus, Sāṅkhya posits a liberated state of conscious being, *sat* and *cit*.⁵⁸ Since this consciousness in liberation remains immersed in its own being or essence, it is free from the suffering inherent in immersion in the temporal experiences of *prakṛti* (*Yoga Sūtras* II.16), but here, too (at least for Sāṅkhya), this is not deemed a blissful experience. It is contentless consciousness.⁵⁹ Thus, the common denominator of all these traditions' view of *yoga* and *mokṣa* so far is primarily one of freedom from pain.

Vedānta goes a step further than just freedom from suffering and ascribes a positive experience of bliss, *ānanda*, to the liberated *ātman*, since it considers *Brahman/ātman* to be constitutionally “made of bliss” *ānandamayo 'bhyāsāt* (*Vedānta Sūtras* I.1.12). The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (II.8) and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (IV.3.37) consider this bliss countless times greater than the temporal pleasures of *prakṛti*. When consciousness is redirected to its source, *ātman*, it reexperiences this bliss inherent in its own being. Thus, for Vedānta, the experience of *mokṣa* is certainly one of *sat* and *cit*, but also of *ānanda* as well.

The *Bhāgavata* takes the graded notion of bliss much further still, since, as we know, those who encounter the *līlās* of Hari find the bliss of *Brahman*/*ātman* inconsequential in comparison (IV.9.10). We can recall that right at the outset of his treatise, Rūpa describes *bhakti* as minimizing *mokṣa*, and thereby any associated bliss inherent in the *ātman*, but he also contrasts this with the “special intense bliss” of *bhakti* (Eastern Quadrant I.17).⁶⁰ In fact, he goes on to state that “if the bliss of *Brahman* were multiplied billionfold, it would not equal an atom in the ocean of bliss of *bhakti*.” In fact, *Brahman* bliss is no greater than the “water in the footprint of a calf for one swimming in the ocean of bliss after attaining a vision of Kṛṣṇa” (Eastern Quadrant I.38–39). Just as the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* takes the bliss of *ātman* to be billions of times greater than the greatest bliss of *prakṛti*, so do Kṛṣṇa practitioners take the bliss of *bhakti* to be billions of times greater than the bliss of *ātman*. Rhetoric aside, *Īśvara*, after all, is the whole, and the *ātman* His part, *aṁśa*, so the bliss ensuing from the infinite whole eclipses anything inherent in its infinitesimal part. In sum, as Rūpa notes: “There are three kinds of happiness: from the senses, from *Brahman*, and from *Īśvara*” (Eastern Quadrant I.130).

Not only do the *bhaktas* eschew liberation, they would rather remain embodied in *prakṛti* if this means they can have senses to hear, speak about, and serve their beloved Lord, even if this means remaining eternally in *saṁsāra*. Indeed, they would prefer to have thousands of senses simultaneously all the more to be able to immerse their minds in thoughts of their beloved Kṛṣṇa: “Please grant me this boon: let me have 10,000 ears [to hear about You]” (IV.20.24). Of course, Hari frees them from this dilemma and awards them a divine *Brahman* body and senses and His personal association for all eternity in His realm of Goloka in accordance with their *bhāva*. But *bhaktas* seek a body with sense organs and a mind of one sort or another, whether made of *prakṛti* or *Brahman*, rather than conventional *mokṣa*, so that they can relate for all eternity to the qualities and pastimes of *Īśvara* by which they have become enamored. Because for them, this is the bliss that has no substitute.

Rūpa concludes the first “wave” of his *Ocean of the Nectar of the Experience of Bhakti* with the truism common to *yoga* traditions in general⁶¹ that the only proof is simply the experience itself. In the case of *bhakti*: “From just a tiny taste of *bhakti*, an experience of its nature occurs; but this does not occur from just rational thought” (Eastern Quadrant I.45). In the words of the *Bhāgavata*: “*Bhakti*, experience of the Supreme, and detachment from all other things, these three things manifest simultaneously for one who is surrendered to Kṛṣṇa, just as satisfaction, nourishment, and the removal of hunger manifest with every mouthful for one who is eating” (XI.2.42). Without tasting its bliss, one cannot claim to have had experience of *bhakti*: “Where is *bhakti* without the hairs standing on end in ecstasy, without the heart melting, and without tears of joy?... One absorbed in *bhakti* to Me [Kṛṣṇa], whose voice is choked up, whose heart melts, who sometimes cries incessantly and sometimes laughs, who cries out without embarrassment and dances, purifies the world” (XI.14.23–24). Such claims cannot be rationalized, and one’s inspiration to seek such experiences or not to do so reflects one’s faith in the words of the *Bhāgavata* or *bhāgavatas* or not.

With regard to rational thought and human reason, continues Rūpa (as anyone who has studied the history of philosophy—Indic or Western—might concur), “a position established diligently by a skillful philosopher, is demonstrated to be inadequate by someone else, who follows a different view” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant 54–46). Or, as the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras* we will encounter in part 5 puts it: “Philosophical debate should not be relied upon, because it is inconclusive, and because there are so many points of view” (74–75). One is reminded here, too, of a verse in the *Mahābhārata*: “Logic is unreliable, the *śrutis* (sacred texts) express divergent viewpoints, and there is no *ṛṣi* (sage) who does not have a different philosophy [from other sages]. The essence of *dharma* is hidden in the innermost recesses of the hearts of realized souls; one should therefore follow the path traversed by an enlightened soul.”⁶² And, earlier still, in a delightful verse from the Upaniṣads: “Therefore a *brāhmaṇa* should give up

scholarship and remain childlike; when he has given up being a scholar as well as being a child, he becomes wise; and when he has ceased to be both wise and unwise, he becomes a [real] *brāhmaṇa*.... All else is frustration” (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* III.5). Thus, reflecting the *Bhāgavata*,⁶³ one of Rūpa’s sixty-four principles of *bhakti* is “renouncing [the study] of many books” (Eastern Quadrant II.79).⁶⁴

In conclusion, there are thus choices to be made in human life in the worldview of the *Bhāgavata*. In conjunction with the other *jñāna* and *yoga* traditions of its day,⁶⁵ the text conceives of the purpose or *raison d’être* of the infinite realm of *prakṛti* as existing simply to indulge those who choose to pursue material desires stemming from ignorance of their true selves. It does this by providing those in ignorance with a psychophysical mechanism with which to experience the objects of desire, as well as an unlimited array of sense objects. In fact, *prakṛti* provides vast numbers of bodily forms⁶⁶ in multiple dimensions, including celestial realms, for souls to attempt to enjoy.⁶⁷ One can wander through them indefinitely, seeking to fulfill these unfulfillable and insatiable desires (*Gītā* III.39) by sampling this or that flavor of sensual indulgence and offering of *prakṛti* through the widely varying sense organs of these bodily forms. *Samsāra* as a dynamic, active realm is nothing other than this. But: “One whose mind is attached to possessions, spouse, and offspring in the duties of the household, does not find higher Truth, but wanders on the many paths of *samsāra*” (IV.25.6). Material desires always fail to fulfill. And there is a price tag on this option: the laws of *karma*. Every action performed in the pursuit of *prakṛtic* happiness breeds a corresponding reaction, which binds and delimits the *ātman*’s freedom in pursuing its future desires (*Yoga Sūtras* II.14).

After becoming exhausted with failing to find ultimate fulfillment through the mind and senses given the temporality of any enjoyment they can provide, and after repeatedly experiencing frustration instead, insight dawns in an occasional person.⁶⁸ This insight recognizes that it is embodied life itself that is essentially suffering, and it is desire itself that

is its ultimate cause (*Gītā* III.37–41; *Yoga Sūtras* II.15ff.). For the Vedic-derived traditions, this leads to the option of renouncing desire and undertaking a quest for *mokṣa*, freedom from suffering, by seeking the true *ātman* self. This is accomplished by dedication to a *yoga* path—which can be defined, in its lowest common denominator, as nothing other than freedom from this suffering.⁶⁹ For such seekers, given that suffering seems encoded and endemic in all activities of *prakṛti* experienced by embodied beings, any end to suffering appears logically to be the opposite—inactive, passive, and static.⁷⁰ Stripped of all *prakṛtic* overlays, such a state naturally appears to consist of just eternal consciousness,⁷¹ and this indeed is the experience of *ātman* when its awareness is redirected to itself as object (*Yoga Sūtras* I.3).⁷²

From the ranks of such seekers, a few may come in contact with *Īśvara* and undertake a *bhakti* practice: “From thousands of people, just one may aspire for perfection, and from those who have attained perfection, hardly one knows Me in Truth” (*Gītā* VII.3; see also *Bhāgavata* VI.14.5). Here, the *Bhāgavata* still keeps company with many but not all *jñāna* and *yoga* traditions.⁷³ But as discussed previously, for some of these theistic traditions, *Īśvara*’s role is only relevant and even delimited to His function as the bestower of realization of the self⁷⁴—that is, the *yogī* can attain *mokṣa* from *samsāra* by *Īśvara*’s grace. In other words, in such schools, the relationship with *Īśvara* and any performance of *bhakti* is practical and one might even say mercantile: the *yogī* essentially utilizes this *Īśvara* Being to ultimately attain freedom from suffering—not out of a deeper permanent commitment to or interest in *Īśvara* Himself.

This functionalist relationship with *Īśvara* is also recognized in the *Bhāgavata*—although less enthusiastically, as we have seen (the mixed *bhakti* discussed previously). But where the *Bhāgavata* and Vaiṣṇava traditions differ from these *mokṣa*-oriented *Īśvara* traditions is that some *yogīs*, irrespective of any initial spiritually mercantile motivation, become so completely enraptured with *Īśvara* once encountered that they prefer to perpetuate this devotional relationship for all eternity. From those who do develop such an attraction, some such *yogīs* recognize

Īśvara to be the Supreme *Ātman* (*Paramātmān*) greater than their own *ātman* (see *Gītā* XIV.18–19), and others are simply enamored by this wondrous Being without necessarily understanding His ontological majesty or caring to do so. For those pursuing this attraction (*rāga*) devoid of any functionalist or recompensatory motivations (the “cheating religions” mentioned in the very first verses of the *Bhāgavata*), these traditions offer the option of liberated postmortem reembodiment, but now in an eternal *Brahman* form and in an eternal *Brahman* locus, beyond *prakṛtic* time and space in a realm comprising *sat-cit-ānanda* rather than the three *guṇas*. For the *Bhāgavata*, *Brahman* includes a dynamic sensual dimension of pure consciousness with forms and qualities—a possibility also hinted at in the *Vedānta Sūtras* and *Mahābhārata*.⁷⁵ These are the realms of *Vaikuṇṭha* and *Goloka*, as well as that of *Śiva*; beyond both the dynamic sensual realm of *prakṛti*—including its variegated celestial dimensions—where form and quality are temporal, vulnerable, ephemeral, and painful—and beyond, too, the passive, trans-sensual, inactive realm of *ātman/Brahman* devoid of forms and qualities, that also transcends *prakṛti*. Until one attains a higher *rasa*, so to speak, this latter passive experience of *ātman* naturally appears the best option: “The seeker does not become disinclined toward the practices of *yoga* until he or she has developed an attraction for the stories of *Kṛṣṇa*.”

For the *Bhāgavata*, from all the forms of *Īśvara*, including that of *Viṣṇu* and *Śiva*, *Kṛṣṇa* is simply the most attractive⁷⁶ (indeed, one of the etymologies of the verbal root *kṛṣ* is “to attract”). *Kṛṣṇa*’s *bhaktas*, the *bhāgavatas*, become so enamored by this flute-playing, mischievous blue boy that all the above options and considerations become redundant—indeed, barely even intrude upon their frame of reference: “The *Bhāgavata* is proclaimed as the essence of all *Vedānta*; one who is satisfied with the nectar of its *rasa* has no interest in anything else” (XII.13, 15). As so many of the quotes presented previously have indicated, and as the ensuing tales and teachings will stress repeatedly, all that such *bhaktas* wish to do is fill their minds with the thoughts, and

their ears, tongues, eyes, and other senses with relishing the qualities, of their beloved *Īśvara*. In this state, one loses “all concern for scriptural prescriptions or logical thought” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* II.292). This is not anti-intellectualism: Jīva, Rūpa, and the other *Gosvāmīs* were intellectual giants of their times, thoroughly schooled in and in dialogue with the scholastic conversations of their day. It is love of God, transrational intoxication that recognizes the limitations of empirical sensual observation and inferential rational thought and has attained blissful experience that bypasses and eclipses these epistemic sources of knowledge (*pramāṇa*). These ecstatic experiences produce a mind-set that seeks only opportunities to love and therefore serve this wondrous Being, irrespective of any locus or dimensionality, whether of embodied life in *prakṛti* or in the divine realm of Goloka—provided, of course, it is not a state of *mokṣa*. The *bhāgavata* would rather remain embodied than attain *mokṣa*. Once again, this is because in conventional *mokṣa* one is deprived of mind and senses with which to focus awareness on *Īśvara*, that is, “because in that state there is no nectar about Your lotus feet, which flows out of the depths of the hearts and through the mouths of the great souls” (IV.20.24). Other than this, anything and everything else, material or spiritual, becomes irrelevant. As the *gopīs* will exemplify within, in advanced stages of *bhakti* one becomes insanely intoxicated with Kṛṣṇa and can think of nothing else.

Indeed, both at the beginning and at the end of the *Tattva Sandarbha*, Jīva actually discourages anyone not interested in worshipping Kṛṣṇa from reading his work.⁷⁷ Likewise, Rūpa cautions the unwary of the consequences of engaging with the very text that takes up part 3 of this volume. This is because the tenth book is nothing other than the literary embodiment of Kṛṣṇa, this mysterious, mischievous stealer of hearts, the etymology of whose very name points to the ultimate seducer and enchanter of souls.⁷⁸ The *Bhāgavata* was written precisely to entice beings away from the attachments and consequent sufferings of *saṁsāra* toward the possibility of an eternal, blissful relationship with the playful, lotus-eyed blue Lord: Hey friends!

If you have any attachment to the company of your family
members Do not gaze upon the form of Hari, who goes by the
name of Govinda Standing here near the banks of the sacred Keśi
ghaṭ

Smiling

Poised with three curves Radiant with the eye of a peacock feather
His wide eyes casting sidelong glances And bud-like lips resting
on His flute Hey ho, you are very naive!

I presume that the sounds Produced by the verses of the tenth book
of the *Bhāgavata* Have become like travellers along the pathways
of your ears Just see, it is because of this That you are now
dismissive of the material goals of life: Duty, material well-being
and the fulfillment of desires (*dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*), Which
bestow the highest well-being And you are even rejecting
liberation (*mokṣa*) Whose essence is happiness.

(Eastern Quadrant IV.239–40)

Notes

Introduction to the Volume

1. The term *purāṇa* will be defined more precisely below.
2. The term “history” has now long been associated not merely with textual narrative, but with empirical disciplines such as archaeology, linguistics, numismatics, and so on. Clearly the Purāṇa literature such as the *Bhāgavata* dealing with Kṛṣṇa’s incarnation is not subject to this type of empirical scrutiny. On the other hand, a term such as “myth” indicates that the stories have no factual basis at all. Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that deals with what constitutes a valid source of knowledge (for instance, empiricism, reason and inference, sacred scripture, and the like), and different epistemologies have been and are prioritized by intellectuals at different points in history and in different contexts and domains. So taking a position that the stories are purely “myths” would be an imposition of epistemological presuppositions and beliefs derived from the post-Enlightenment West upon the worldviews and convictions of countless millions of devotees over a period of two millennia and thereby would run contrary to the stated purpose of this volume, which is precisely to attempt to represent a sense of such beliefs. The term “legend,” in contrast, remains neutral as to the truth content of the stories, indicating simply that these stories present themselves as truth and have been handed down as such, without taking any further stance as to their veracity. We discuss such problems further in the chapter “Concluding Reflections.”
3. As is by now well-known, “Hinduism” is not a term found in Indic texts prior to the sixteenth century, as it was appropriated from the immigrants and invaders who had introduced it into India. We retain it now for practical purposes, given its de facto intractable usage to refer to the vast array of beliefs and practices that retain some form of nominal allegiance to the old Vedic texts.
4. Jīva and Rūpa quote the *Bhāgavata* abundantly, since as traditional commentators they strive to exemplify each theological point with a quote from the primary text in order to substantiate and authorize the devotional principles they are organizing into a system in their expositions. So by following Jīva and Rūpa, we will likewise be quoting profusely from the *Bhāgavata* itself in part 1 also.
5. We must note, of course, that there are many expressions of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, and we are featuring its more elite—in the sense of erudite and scholastic—canon-forming tradition, imparted by the lineage’s founding figurehead, Caitanya, to Rūpa, whose work we feature, and other followers.

6. The term “Indic” refers to anything written in ancient Sanskrit (the linguistic name for which is Indo-Aryan), but I use it primarily when I wish to refer to commonalities in thought between Vedic, Buddhist, Jain, and other such traditions.
7. Thus, we begin with some delimiters: the goal of this volume is not to attempt to lay out some of the prominent features or personages of the diachronically and synchronically variegated landscape of *bhakti* by tracing its historical, geographic, social, or cultural roots from early historical sources through its growth into its numerous branches past and present. These are all essential projects in their own rights, but they are not the focus of interest in this volume.
8. As filtered through the subjective understanding of this author, needless to say: we claim no privileged access to any authorial intention underpinning these texts. However, we have tried to minimize our own filter by dint of translating the sources themselves, but, naturally, what we have selected and what omitted reflect our own subjective dispositions.
9. I note also, for my colleagues in the academy, briefly and perhaps simplistically, that it is my position that one way to navigate around the postcolonial, post-Orientalist impasse as to how to represent non-Western traditions such as those of *bhakti yoga*, without perpetuating the Eurocentric attitudes and stereotypes as well as the Christian presuppositions and biases of the founders and predecessors of our field of the study of religion, is precisely to at least endeavor to allow these traditions to speak in their own voices, using their own intellectual concepts and terminologies. In other words, to attempt to consider these traditions’ own theologies, practices, metaphysics, epistemologies, and worldviews in their own right, without being filtered either through the religious vocabularies and assumptions of our Western religious traditions or through the theoretical categories and secular presuppositions of our modern Western post-Enlightenment academies. To explicitly or implicitly assume they have so little to offer in their own terms that they require the imposition of Western categories of knowledge and theoretical analysis is, to say the least, a remarkable act of hubris that has long extended its shelf life. This is not to deny that such texts have their own ideologies and attempt to normalize and impose their own structures of power, such as caste and the like. But so much attention has been directed to this aspect of *brahmanical* Sanskrit culture that we have chosen to direct our own focus on the aspects of the *Bhāgavata* that concern theology, soteriology, and praxis (we do, however, make some comments on *bhakti* and *dharma* in part 1; see “*Bhakti and Dharma*”).
10. I use the somewhat problematic term “classical” to refer to transregional Veda-acknowledging texts that reached their completion by or shortly after the Gupta period from the fourth to the sixth century C.E. (as I have argued is the case with the *Bhāgavata*; Bryant 2002).
11. Of course, numerous preexisting ingredients that Patañjali was systematizing in his *Sūtras*, such as the eight limbs of practice and various other elements, surface or are appropriated in numerous distinct sectarian contexts, Jain, Buddhist, Vaiṣṇava, Śākta, Śaiva, and so forth.
12. Although the view that Vyāsa was Patañjali himself writing a commentary on his own *Sūtras* has recently resurfaced with the dedicated work of Philipp Maas (2010).
13. Thus while, for example, the sixteenth-century commentator Vijñānabhikṣu may quibble with the earlier commentator Vācaspati Miśra, and introduce a good deal of Vedānta-related issues, there is no disagreement on the essential metaphysics of Yoga or on the nature of its mental states, practices, or goals (see discussion in Bryant 2009, xxxix).
14. Thus, from the various topics the *Bhāgavata* claims to comprise (noted later), part 2 is concerned with *mukti*, the attainment of liberation from suffering through the practice of *bhakti*.
15. From its stated list of topics, Kṛṣṇa is the *Bhāgavata*’s tenth and final subject matter, the

substratum (*āśraya*) or goal of everything else.

16. See Bryant (2003) and, for the most comprehensive academic study on the Purāṇas as a genre, Rocher (1986).
17. Based on Bryant (2003, ixff.).
18. Even the non-Vedic Buddhist and Jain traditions partly defined themselves in contradistinction to the Vedic one.
19. For instance, see *Kūrma Purāṇa*, *Pūrva* 52.19–20; *Padma Purāṇa*, *Uttara-khaṇḍa* 236.18–21.
20. There are, of course, other texts, such as the *Āgamas* and *Pañcarātras*, that provide much information pertaining to the minutiae of ritual and theological technicalities, but they are of interest primarily to ritual specialists and theologians.
21. In addition to the eighteen *mahā* (great) Purāṇas, there are a further eighteen *upā* (minor) Purāṇas, which are just as extensive in scope but deemed less authoritative, being later in composition and much less widespread.
22. See *Matsya Purāṇa* 53.9–11; *Śiva Purāṇa* VII.1.1.37–38.
23. Brahmā is more of an engineer than a creator in the classical sense, since he creates the forms of the universe from preexisting matter. But in texts such as the *Bhāgavata*, matter itself emanates from Viṣṇu, who is thus the primary creator. Śiva is assigned the same status in the Śaiva Purāṇas, but Brahmā is never the supreme creator God in this ultimate sense.
24. *Gītā* (VIII.17) points to Brahmā's life span.
25. The Goddess (Śākta) traditions tend to be monistic, rather than strictly monotheist, a distinction we will discuss in part 5.
26. See the papers in Gupta and Valpey (2013) as well as Beck (2005) for some sense of this. See also the papers in "Vaishnavism and the Arts" in *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 21, no. 2 (2013).
27. Much of this explosion of interest in the text stems from our featured sixteenth-century Caitanya tradition, of which Jīva is a follower.
28. See Sharpe (1985, 83ff.) and Davis (2015) for some sense of this.
29. There are actually several thousand verses fewer than eighteen thousand, but traditional exegetes factor in the extra length of prose passages, as well as colophons and the like, to justify the traditional number (see Satyanārāyaṇa Dāsa 1995, 80n1) for discussion.
30. These were initiated by influential charismatics such as Caitanya and Vāllabha, whom we will encounter within.
31. This is mostly on the grounds that neither the later dynasties nor later famous rulers such as Harṣa in the seventh century C.E. are to be found in the king lists contained in the texts.
32. Bryant (2002).
33. A number of the other Purāṇas clearly mention the *Bhāgavata* along with some mention of its subject matter (*Skanda Purāṇa*, *Prabhāsa-khaṇḍa* 7.1.2.39–42; *Agni Purāṇa* 272.6–7; *Padma Purāṇa*, *Uttara-khaṇḍa* 22.115, 198.30, and elsewhere; *Matsya Purāṇa* 53.20–22; these and other references from Satyanārāyaṇa Dāsa 1995). However, in contradiction to this, as we will see in the Tale of Vyāsa, the *Bhāgavata* places itself as being written by the despondent Vyāsa shortly after the completion of the other Purāṇas. Also, we need not concern ourselves with the controversy raised by the followers of the *Devī Bhāgavata*, that these references to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in the other Purāṇas refer to their *Devī* text, not that of the Vaiṣṇavas (for which see Mackenzie Brown 1983; and Dāsa 1995, 88ff.).
34. See, for discussion, Preciado-Solis (1984).
35. See appendix 1 for discussion on the *Śruti* and *Smṛti* genres of sacred text.
36. For example, see III.8.7–9.
37. These are *sarga*, creation of the universe; *visarga*, secondary creation of forms within the universe; *vṛtti*, maintenance of the living entities; *rakṣā*, protection of living entities;

manvantara, governance of the various Manu dynasties; *vaṁsa*, dynasties of great kings; *vaṁsānucarita*, activities of the kings in these dynasties; *saṁsthā*, annihilation of universe; *hetu*, motivation; and *apāśraya*, the Supreme shelter (*Īśvara*) (XII.7.9–10). Earlier in the text, these are labeled somewhat differently: *sarga*, primordial creation; *visarga*, secondary creation; *sthāna*, maintenance; *poṣaṇa*, sustenance/grace; *ūti*, desire; *manvantara*, periods of the Manus; *Īśānukathā*, stories of *Īśvara*’s incarnations; *nirodha*, annihilation of the universe; *mukti*, liberation; and *āśraya*, ultimate shelter (II.10.1–2). According to other Purāṇas, there are only five topics: *sarga*, *pratisarga* (destruction), *Manv-antarāṇi*, *vaṁsa*, and *vaṁsanucarita* (*Matsya Purāṇa* 53.65).

38. *Tattva Sandarbha* (*anuccheda* 58).

39. The name used here is Uttamaśloka, literally “verses about whom are supreme.”

40. Book 11, in fact, is mostly devoted to Kṛṣṇa’s instructions to Uddhava, sometimes called the *Uddhāva Gītā*. It covers a vast range of subject matter, including social and civic duties as well as all manner of yogic and religious practices, all culminating in *bhakti*.

41. The Indian painting collection at the Brooklyn Museum is a good example of this.
42. In point of fact, Vṛndāvana is the town that has developed since the sixteenth century in the place where a number of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes took place, where Vraj includes but also extends beyond this to a much larger area touching the outskirts of Delhi.
43. See Haberman (1994b) and Entwhistle (1987).
44. See *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, *Madhya-līlā* 20.
45. Jīva Gosvāmī credits the directive to write his six *Sandarbhas* to his uncle Rūpa but acknowledges that Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī compiled the original version of the *Sandarbhas*, based on the works of older Vaiṣṇava theologians, which he is systematizing and completing (*anu* 3–5).
46. A verse of unknown origin, quoted from Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa by Dāsa (*Tattva* 13).
47. We will also be representing arguments from the first *Sandarbha*, the *Tattva*, in appendix 1.
48. The Vedānta tradition stems from the ancient Upaniṣads, the oldest mystic-philosophical texts in Sanskrit. By locating itself as a Vedānta tradition, the Gauḍīya theologians are laying claim to representing the Ultimate Truths of the ancient Vedic heritage, the oldest Sanskrit and Indo-European texts (see the chapter “The Object of *Bhakti*: *Īśvara*, *Bhagavān*, *Brahman*, and Divine Hierarchies” and appendix 1).
49. Jīva adopts a fourfold schema in conceptualizing the contents of the *Sandarbhas*: the subject (*viśaya*), who is Kṛṣṇa; the relationship (*sambandha*) between Him and His *śaktis*, “energies,” such as the *jīvas*, living beings; the process for attaining Him (*abhidheya*, that which is to be spoken of); and the ultimate purpose or goal to be acquired (*prayojana*), which is love of God, *prema*.
50. Satyanārāyaṇa's Dāsa's erudite Sanskrit edition and translation of the *Bhakti Sandarbha* is available, and at the time of this writing, he has completed the translation of and is preparing all six *Sandarbhas* for publication (see www.jiva.org for status). Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* is also worthy of more robust consideration for anyone with a serious interest in Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, for which Haberman (2003) has produced an excellent annotated English translation. I made use of both of these translations to determine which passages to select for part 1 of this work, but all Sanskrit translations are my own. Similarly, owing to the extensive amount of Sanskrit materials involved, I availed myself of the translations of the *Bhāgavata* noted in the next note, in order to determine which tales and teachings to extract for part 2, and then used the Chowkambha Sanskrit edition of the text for my own translations of these sections.
51. Here, Bhaktivedānta Swāmī's multivolume translation and commentary is the easiest available in numerous languages—as is his version of the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* as well as his trademark rendition of the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata* under the title *Kṛṣṇa* (all of which can be downloaded for free at www.vedabase.com). Being written by a preeminent devotee of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the founder of ISKCON, the Hare Krishna Movement, these devotionally laden editions underscore the spiritual appeal of *bhakti* as what we will call in “Concluding Reflections” a “living tradition.” This author's own lifelong dedication to studying the traditions of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* stems from encountering these books in the late 1970s. There is a highly recommended accessible edition with the Gauḍīya commentary of Viśvanātha by Bhanu Swami (2008–11), where one receives both text and verse-by-verse exegesis. Other than this, for those with access to Indian publishing houses, the Motilal Banarsidass edition translated by Tagare (1976–78) is excellent, as is the translation by Gosvami C. L. (n.d.). Additionally, we ourselves have published a literal annotated translation of the tenth book under the title *Krishna: The Beautiful Legend of God* (2003), and the stories of Kṛṣṇa in part 3 consist of extracts from this.

Definition of *Bhakti*

1. For example, see *Yoga Sūtras* II.15–16, and the definition of *yoga* itself as “freedom from suffering” in *Gītā* VI.23.
2. The Cārvāka-related philosophies (which left no formal school or body of literature of their own) accepted neither an *ātman* nor *Īśvara* (see Bhattacharya 2011 for a compilation of sources from other schools on these traditions).
3. The first time the term *viveka*, insight, is used in the *Yoga Sūtras* is in relation to the realization by a wise person that all is suffering. This *viveka* is then developed by the practices of *yoga* (II.28) and reaches its zenith as that which removes *avidyā*, ignorance, and bestows liberation (II.25–26).
4. Jīva calls this taking of shelter *śaraṇāpatti*. He quotes the Vaiṣṇava Tantra: “There are six elements in *śaraṇāpatti*: the determination to act favorably, the avoidance of unfavorable actions, the belief that ‘*Īśvara* will protect me,’ the conscious acceptance of *Īśvara* as one’s protector, the submission of the self, and humility” (*anu* 236, reference not given). The fourth item from this list, according to Jīva, consciously accepting *Īśvara* as one’s protector, is especially associated with *śaraṇāpatti*, with the other five serving as *aṅgas*, limbs.
5. In the words of the *Bhāgavata*: “O Lord! For one afflicted by the threefold suffering in the terrifying fire of *saṁsāra*, I see no other shelter than your lotus feet, which are like an umbrella raining down nectar” (XI.19.9).
6. For the *Gītā*, see VII.7, X.8, and throughout.
7. The great monotheistic deities are, in fact, almost always accompanied by their consorts: Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, Śiva-Parvatī, Sītā-Rāma, and so on.
8. There are many names for Kṛṣṇa, and the one used here is Hṛṣīkeśa, “the Lord of the senses.” I am standardizing these alternatives here for ease of reference, but on occasion I retain them in parts 2 and 3, as the choice of names reflects specific associations that are being invoked according to context.
9. *Nārada Pañcarātra*, quoted in *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant I.12, exact reference not given. Tradition associates this text, too, with the epic sage Nārada (see *Bhāgavata* I.3.8).
10. *Bhakti* is a nominal form of the verbal root *bhaj*.
11. *Garuḍa Purāṇa* (*pūrva kaṇḍa* 227.3). However, the first line of Jīva’s verse does not appear in the Nag edition of this *Purāṇa*. The verse adds instead that the *bhaktas* engage in reciting the names and deeds of the Lord of the Universe.
12. According to Jīva, this eliminates other forms of meditation on Kṛṣṇa, such as hatred (as in the case of Kṛṣṇa’s enemies, Kāṁsa, Śiśupāla, or Pauṇḍraka, indicated in *Bhāgavata* X.29.13, 66.24, and 87.23), which can also award liberation and are discussed in “Meditation in Hate and Lust.”
13. We will elaborate on *bhakti* motivated by a desire for *jñāna* or *karma* in “*Bhakti* Mixed with Attachment to *Dharma* and *Jñāna*.”
14. These are: residing in the same abode as Viṣṇu (*sālokya*), having the same opulence as Him (*sārṣṭi*), being close to Him (*sāmīpya*), having the same form as Him (*sārūpya*), and merging into Him (*sāyujya/ekatvam*). They are discussed in “The Liberated *Bhakta*: Different Types of *Mokṣa* in the *Bhāgavata*.”
15. These are: “*bhakti* destroys all obstacles (*kleśas*); it brings auspiciousness; it minimizes [interest in] *mokṣa* (liberation); it is very difficult to attain; it has a special intense bliss bestowing nature; and it attracts Śrī Kṛṣṇa” (*Upadeśāmṛta*, 17).

The Practices of *Bhakti*

1. We can recall that Rūpa divides his *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* (*Ocean of the Nectar of the Experience of Bhakti*) into four “quadrants,” from which we will mostly be quoting the Eastern Quadrant.
2. The relationship between Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa will be discussed in the chapter “The Object of *Bhakti*: *Īśvara*, *Bhagavān*, *Brahman*, and Divine Hierarchies.” They are the same Supreme Being, manifest in different forms to accomplish different purposes.
3. The *Maitrī Upaniṣad* (VI18), for example, speaks of six limbs, and there were various other variants (see Bryant 2009, xxiff.).
4. *Śravaṇa*, *manana*, *nidhidhyāsana*, hearing about, reflecting, and concentrating on the *ātman*, have their roots in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (II.4.5). In later texts, a fourth is added, *samādhi*, absorption of consciousness in its own ultimate nature (see Sadānanda’s *Vedāntasāra* I.4.128).
5. As a technical aside, in Vedānta (and *Mīmāṃsā*) hermeneutics, the placing of items first (and last) on a list reflects their importance with relation to other items listed.
6. “Some do not desire liberation, O Lord. Freed from all distress they immerse themselves in the great nectarean ocean of stories about the forms you have assumed in order to teach Truth about the self” (X.87.21).
7. Sarvabhāvāna Dāsa translation, 238–39.
8. “Dishonesty” is here understood as any scriptural teaching promoting bodily, mental, or worldly (that is, temporal and nonultimate) gain as its goal (rather than imparting teachings about the soul or God).
9. These are the miseries caused by one’s own body and mind, by other living entities, and by the environment.
10. The *kalpa-taru* is a tree in the celestial realm that offers anything requested of it.
11. The passage adds, “The *Bhāgavata* is permeated with the nectar flowing from the mouth of sage Śuka.” Śuka, the speaker of the *Bhāgavata*, also means “parrot.” The poetic implication (*dhvani*) here is that as the parrot will choose the sweetest fruit with its beak, so Śuka has spoken the highest and most relishable of scriptures with his mouth.
12. *Aho!* is a common exclamation.
13. The passage appeals to the connoisseurs “of poetic experience (*rasa*) and experts of poetic moods (*bhāva*).” These terms will be discussed in “*Rāga*, *Bhāva*, and *Rasa*” in the context of the *Bhāgavata*’s appropriation of them. Their origins lie in Indian aesthetics, where *rasa* refers to the aesthetic experience felt by the audience in, say, a well-performed drama, and *bhāva* the mood it invokes.
14. The *Mahābhārata* epic does in fact contain descriptions of the adult Kṛṣṇa, as does the *Harivaṃśa* appendage to it, which includes narratives from the youthful portion of Kṛṣṇa’s life. Similarly with some of the Purāṇas, especially the Viṣṇu and Padma. But the *rasa* and *bhāva* elements of such centrality to the *bhakti* of the sixteenth-century Kṛṣṇa theologians are much less discernible in those literary sources.
15. These are four *puruṣārthas*, goals of human life.
16. The passage adds: “But that composition, even if its every verse is improperly composed, destroys the sins of people if it contains [the sacred] names denoting the glory of the

unlimited Lord. Saints hear, recite, and glorify them.”

17. “The chanting of the name of Hari has been prescribed for those *yogīs* who are disinterested [in material enjoyment] and who desire freedom from fear” (II.1.11).
18. At least, in the Indic context, this is partly true according to the Nyāya school of philosophy, although this school would hold that meaning is assigned by *Īśvara*. The followers of the school of Mīmāṃsā, in contrast (along with the Grammarians), would posit that Vedic words and their designations are eternal, based on their belief that the Vedas are eternal, and hence so are the words they contain. In fact, other philosophical schools, including perhaps Patañjali’s Yoga tradition (see Rukmani 1975; Bryant 2009, 106ff.), also hold that Sanskrit words and their denotations are eternal, and thus language is not conventionally derived.
19. We will discuss below how Kṛṣṇa’s form is made from pure *Brahman*, consciousness (*caitanya*).
20. The famous *cintāmaṇi* is a gem found in Viṣṇu’s *Brahman* realm of Vaikuṇṭha, which can fulfill any wish posed to it.
21. The “etc.” here applies to the vision of Kṛṣṇa, as also any contact with Him through the other senses.
22. While other monotheistic traditions tend to prioritize the notion of “visions” of God, *bhakti* traditions, while also featuring visions, prioritize sonic presence. See Beck (1993) for a problematizing of assigning higher epistemic value to the visual. In fact, from a philosophical perspective (for example, the school of Vaiśeṣikā), if form and sound are both qualities that reveal their substances, why should the form of a substance be prioritized as somehow more authentically true of the existence of that substance than any other quality such as sound? Since both require a sense organ to be perceived by consciousness (the *ātman*), what determines that the eye is a more reliable implement than the ear? Applied to *Īśvara*, then, why should *Īśvara* manifest as form be deemed more authoritative or authentic a spiritual experience than *Īśvara* manifest as sound?
23. Quoted from Dimock 2000, 899.
24. For the *kleśas*, ignorance, ego, desire, aversion, and fear of death, see *Yoga Sūtras* II.2ff.
25. *Samsāra* is the cycle of birth and death.
26. For example, see *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* VI.2.17.
27. As is evident in the quote, in each *yuga*, epoch, humankind is prescribed a particular type of devotional activity in the Purāṇas. In the present and most degenerate age, the *Kali yuga*, *kīrtana* is prescribed, as it is the most easily accomplished for the misfortunate people born in this age. The *Bhāgavata* even states that people in previous *yugas* aspire to take birth in *Kali* because of this ease (XI.5.38).
28. See also XI.5.32.
29. *Ārya* is an ancient Sanskrit term denoting a civilized person, or one who follows the righteous codes of conduct outlined in late Vedic texts.
30. The prefix *sañ* here indicates communal *kīrtana*.
31. In early *Brāhmaṇa* texts, *japa* refers to the soft repetition of Vedic *mantras* by priests. See *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* I.3.28, VI.3.6; *Chandogya Upaniṣad* V.2.6.
32. See, for example, *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*.
33. For instance, *Yoga Sūtras* I.27–28 and *Gītā* VII.8.
34. See VII.8, IX.17.
35. The traditional day in Hinduism is divided into eighteen *muhūrtas*, out of which seventeen are considered to be dominated by the lethargic energy of the *guṇa* of *tamas* or agitating energy of that of *rajas* (the three *guṇas* will be discussed in the chapter “The Object of *Bhakti*: *Īśvara*, *Bhagavān*, *Brahman*, and Divine Hierarchies”). In only one *muhūrta* is the

peaceful and content *guṇa* of *sattva* dominant—the *muhūrta* before sunrise.

36. This mood is how *bhaktas* might interpret “keeping its meaning in mind,” *tad-artha-bhāvanam*, in Patañjali’s verse on how one should perform *japa* on *om* (I.27–28).
37. The worship of the *tulasī* plant, sacred to Kṛṣṇa, is discussed later.
38. ISKCON has by now both spawned a variety of offshoots and set the stage for other branches of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition to also propagate the Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* of the Caitanya tradition (see Bryant and Ekstrand 2004).
39. Hence the phrase “Kṛṣṇa Consciousness.” This phraseology was foundational to the language adopted by Bhaktivedānta Swami, founder of the Hare Krishna Movement, who was responsible for the transplanting of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* all around the world in the 1960s.
40. See also chapter 9 and the sequencing of practices in XII.1–12, and of *yogīs* in VI.46–47.
41. As a very interesting aside, and while this is beyond the scope of this work, it would be interesting to trace what I suspect to be the progressive “caucasianization” of Kṛṣṇa from paintings depicting Him in art prior to the colonial period to the chronological production of art thereafter (one of our undergraduate students did, in fact, undertake a cursory study of paintings in the Brooklyn Museum collections that did point to this phenomenon). Be this as it may, both Kṛṣṇa and Shyāma (a very popular appellation for this deity) mean black. The color, when described, is that of a dark monsoon cloud.
42. Even as one can fix the mind on any object “according to one’s inclination” (*Yoga Sūtras* I.39), *Īśvara* is prioritized by dint of heading the list of *ālambanas*, objects upon which the mind can be fixed in concentration, which according to traditional (*Mīmāṃsā*) hermeneutics indicates preeminence. Additionally, *Īśvara* as *ālambana* receives eight verses where other suggested *ālambanas* receive only one each. Moreover, only *Īśvara* can bestow liberation, where other objects cannot (II.45). Hence Patañjali is discreetly and nonassertively, but nonetheless clearly, prioritizing this form of practice. (See commentary to I.44 in Bryant 2003, 152–53, for an application of *Īśvara* meditation in the context of Patañjali’s *samādhi* sequencing.)
43. This metaphor is also found in the *Yoga Sūtras* commentaries. The commentaries to *Yoga Sūtras* III.1–3 highlight the difference between *dhāraṇa* and *dhyāna* by comparing a dripping water tap with the thick, unctuous flow of oil. The drips from a tap have identical drops of water punctuated by gaps, paralleling the mind focusing on its support, interspersed with periodic distractions, as in *dhāraṇa*. The pouring of oil, which flows without drips, is comparable to the undeviating flow of the mind when it has reached a stage of undistracted one-pointedness, as in *dhyāna*.
44. See, for instance, *Yoga Sūtras* I.17 and 42–46 and commentaries.
45. This is sometimes referred to as *sa-guṇa Brahman*, *Brahman* with qualities, but the term *guṇa*, in this case, refers not to the *guṇas* of *prakṛti*, but rather to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikā sense of quality.
46. This account and the vision of Kṛṣṇa obtained by Nārada in I.6.18 are narrated in part 2.
47. Dimock 2000, 960–61. See also *Antya-līlā* 14.81–106.
48. This is a cultural reenactment of *Bhāgavata* X.83 and the main religious festival in the East Indian state of Orissa.
49. Service to the *tulasī* plant is also included in this category of *bhakti*: “One should worship the Lord with pure water, garlands of forest flowers, roots and fruits, etc., freshly cut sprouts and stems, and with the *tulasī* plant, which is dear to the Lord” (IV.8.55). Although there is little explicit reference to worshipping *tulasī* in the *Bhāgavata* (see X.13.49), traditionally, a *tulasī* is typically grown and worshipped in Vaiṣṇava households, and certainly in temples. In prescriptive Kṛṣṇaism, food is offered to the Deity (discussed in the next process) before consumption, in the form both of lavish offerings in temples and at the modest family meal

of the Vaiṣṇava householder prior to the family partaking of it, and one leaf of *tulasī* is placed on each item of foodstuffs. *Tulasī*'s sanctity is further underscored by the fact that practicing Kṛṣṇa *bhaktas* can be recognized by the necklace of *tulasī* wood beads worn around their necks (as can Śaivites, by *rudrākṣa* beads).

50. See "The Liberated *Bhakta*: Different Types of *Mokṣa* in the *Bhāgavata*."

51. Verse number not given.
52. See Holdredge (2013) for an excellent analysis of divine embodiment in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism.
53. The *śālagrāma* is a sacred stone found in the *Gaṇḍakī* river of Nepal that does not require ritualistic installation to invoke the Deity, as *Īśvara*'s direct presence is deemed eternally present within it.
54. This is a form made of eternity (*sat*), pure consciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ānanda*), rather than matter (*prakṛti*). But it is a form.
55. The *guṇas* are discussed in “*Prakṛti* and the Three *Guṇas*: *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*.”
56. Of course, present *karma* reflects choices made in the past.
57. “Other agency” can include partial incarnations such as Vyāsa.
58. Literally “Joy of the king of Vraja,” Kṛṣṇa's father.
59. This refers to the *Pañcarātra* genre of texts, which are the source for most of the ritual aspects of the Vaiṣṇava traditions.
60. Thus in Gauḍīya worship, twelve names of Kṛṣṇa (such as *om Keṣavāya namaḥ*, *om Govindāya namaḥ*) are consecutively invoked in *nyāsa*, each one specific to one of twelve bodily parts touched in a circular fashion (forehead, belly, chest, throat; then waist and arm on the right side; then shoulder on the right; then waist, arm, and shoulder on the left side, followed by top of the back, and, last, lower back).
61. This “root” *mantra* is typically received from the *guru* and is sect-specific.
62. Thus, Nandi, Śiva's bull carrier, for example, is also worshipped in Śiva *pūjā*, as is Hanumān, the monkey *bhakta*, in Rāma worship, and so on.
63. Thus, *om namo Śivāya*, for Śiva; *om namo Bhāgavate Vāsudevāya*, for Kṛṣṇa; and so forth.
64. We will see later that the *ātman* is an *aṁśa*, or partial manifestation, of *Īśvara* (who is everything, including the individual *ātman*) and, in this sense, “made of Him.”
65. The household Deity is typically moved from its altar in order to bathe and dress it and so forth and is returned upon completion of the worship. Temples with large immovable deities typically have a small Deity also invested with divine presence that can be moved and bathed and so on: “The Deity can be established in the temple in two ways: movable and non-movable; when worshipping a non-movable Deity, the *āvāhana* (invoking) and *udvāsa* (bidding farewell) are not necessary” (XI.27.14).
66. Jīva notes, in terms of the very personal meditation accompanying the rituals, that in order to cultivate love, “when one offers food, one should contemplate the Lord's beaming face” (*anu* 296).
67. This entire section contains more ritualistic specifics, elaborating on those quoted previously in XI.3.
68. Tantric here refers to the aforementioned Sanskrit textual sources that deal with the prescriptive details of deity worship, the *Āgamas* and *Pañcarātras*. Note the different but possibly overlapping usage of the term *kriyā yoga*, the path of acts, in *Yoga Sūtras* II.1.
69. These are the four monsoon months, a period when itinerant ascetics (*sādhus*) are allowed to remain in one place.
70. *Ekādasi* is “the eleventh” day of the full moon and of the new moon. Vaiṣṇavas fast from grains or from all foodstuffs on these two days of the month.
71. Vaiṣṇavas wear sacred markings made from paste from the clay of the *Gaṅgā* or *Yamunā* rivers on the twelve parts of the body mentioned previously as part of *nyāsa*.
72. In fact, by worshipping the Deity, the defect of disrespecting others can be curbed (*anu* 290). According to the *Bhāgavata*, it was in the third of the four *yugas* (world ages), the *Tretā* age, that deity worship was introduced, after strife entered into human affairs (one might assume so as to bring people together for a higher common purpose): “After

perceiving the nature of strife between people in the age of *Tretā*, the deity worship of Hari was established by the sages” (VII.14.37).

73. I have reversed the order of the verses, here, placing 39–40 before 37–38.

74. See *Gītā* V.18.

75. As always, Jīva illustrates this practice from the *Bhāgavata*: “One who offers obeisance to you with heart, words, and body; contemplates Your compassion; and accepts the ripened fruits of personal *karma* that have been accumulated receives Your mercy and lives in a state of liberation” (X.14.8).

76. In Hinduism, 108 is a sacred number. Reasons given for this are as numerous as the sects that provide them. But, for example, the *japa mālā* (rosary) has 108 beads.

77. See Bryant 2009, xxiiiiff.

78. This was composed by Gopal Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī, one of the six *Gosvāmīs* of Vṛndāvana noted earlier. Drawing from the South Indian *Pāñcarātriśa Āgamas*, it is the authoritative text on the full detailed universe of *vaidhī bhakti* for the Gauḍīya tradition.

79. In the final three verses of the *Upadeśāmṛta*, Rūpa assigns gradations to the various holy places associated with Kṛṣṇa, such as Mathurā.

80. These are typically listed as cleanliness, contentment, austerity, study of scripture, and devotion to *Īśvara* (for example, see *Yoga Sūtras* II.32). Rūpa would have assumed and intended the *yamas* as well.

81. These are also known as *niskāmā bhakti*, devotion performed with no desire for any personal gain, and *sakāmā bhakti*, devotion performed for the fulfillment of self-centered desire. The former is also known as *akiñcanā bhakti*.

82. “Even pure knowledge [of the *ātman*] free of attachment to the fruits of action does not shine forth if devoid of devotion for Kṛṣṇa; let alone action, which is always inferior when not offered to *Īśvara*” (I.5.12, repeated verbatim in XII.12.53).

83. See Coleman (2010) and the bibliography therein for critiques of the text in this regard. For an analysis and critique of the efforts of a modern Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava expression, ISKCON (the Hare Krishna Movement), attempting to reestablish the *varṇāśrama* social order and gender dynamics in its communities based on the founder’s reading of the *Bhāgavata*, see the articles in part 5 of Bryant and Ekstrand (2014).

84. The term *dharma* in fact has numerous usages: in Nyāya, it is the property of a substance; in Buddhism, the teachings of the Buddha; and so forth.

85. This is explicit in *Bhāgavata* VII.2.31 and 35; and arguably implicit in *Gītā* IV.13.

86. The cluster of *dharma*s incumbent on an *ātman* taking birth as a *kṣatriya* female in one birth, for example, will be quite different from those the same *ātman* encounters in a subsequent birth as, say, a *brāhmaṇa* male, and completely different again from those in any birth as a dog (which also has a *dharma*, or inherent nature and place in the grand scheme of things), and so on. Even in one life, youthful *dharma*s might differ from elderly ones.

87. See, for instance, II.47ff. Even the *Gītā* acknowledges that *karma yoga* was innovative for its day and age (IV.2–3), as the expectation surrounding the practice of *yoga* at the time was that it involved the cessation of all actions so as not to perpetuate *karmic* reaction and subsequent *saṁsāra*. Hence, in the older texts, including the *Gītā*, *yoga* is associated with asceticism, typically in the forest.

88. See, for example, IX.27.

89. See, for example, VII.11–14 and XI.17–18.

90. See, for example, XVIII.66.

91. See *Mīmāṃsā Sūtras* IV.2.

92. We will discuss the differences here more fully in the chapter “The Object of *Bhakti*: *Īśvara*, *Bhagavān*, *Brahman*, and Divine Hierarchies.”

93. See *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* I.7–11; *Gītā* II.42–45; *Yoga Sūtras* I.15.
94. The normative goal of Vedic *dharma*, the conventional religiosity of the time, was material gain in this world and the attainment of the celestial realms in the next (see *Gītā* II.42–46 for a deprecatory dig at such attitudes).
95. Indeed, the text has extensive passages outlining the *dharma* duties of the various castes, especially in the eleventh book.
96. These are listed in the *Mahābhārata* (V.43.12) as knowledge, truthfulness, control, tranquillity, freedom from malice, modesty, tolerance, freedom from envy, charity, performance of sacrifice, austerity, and sacred learning.
97. See also III.33.7.
98. According to the commentator Śrīdhara, the threefold birth is that from the parents, that pertaining to initiation into the *brāhmaṇa* caste, and that pertaining to initiation for performing a sacrifice.
99. Since those arguing for caste based on birthright do so on the authority of statements made in sacred texts, a number of Hindu apologists and spokespersons agitating against such notions of birthright have countered such claims by reference to contrary statements in other sacred texts (or passages in the same texts). The *Bhāgavata* is thus relevant to such enterprises.
100. For an important and well-argued critique of the view (including statements made by this author) that such subversion has potential relevance to the real world of gender or other social power dynamics, see Coleman (2010). Coleman, in fact, sees the *Bhāgavata* as consciously reasserting male patriarchal dominance. Nonetheless, where women were excluded from other forms of religiosity at the time, such as Vedic ritualistic recitation and active performance at the sacrificial rites, or orthodox Vedānta study, the fact that the *Bhāgavata* not only includes female participation, but extols it as preeminent, is not trivial.

101. These are all tribes outside of the Vedic fold, some of them foreign to the subcontinent, most famously the *yavana*, a reference to the Greeks (a Sanskritization of the term “Ionian”).
102. For a discussion of the social innovativeness of the *Bhāgavata*, see Hopkins (1966).
103. See *Bhāgavata* V.19.21ff. for the celestials musing about how, from the perspective of *yoga*, they would have been better off being born on the earth.
104. See Doniger and Smith (1991) and Olivelle (1999).
105. These are also referred to *puṇya* vs. *apuṇya* in the *Yoga Sūtras* (II.14–15) and *karma* vs. *vikarma* in *Gītā* (IV.17). The *Gītā* here also speaks of *akarma*, “inaction.”
106. Of course, *samādhi* (*asaṁprajñāta*) in the *Yoga Sūtras* refers to the ultimate reimmersion of the *ātman* in its own nature (I.3, II.20), which is not of interest to Jīva’s *bhakti* as we will see later.
107. Jīva exemplifies *bhakti* performed to satisfy personal desires through the example of sage Kardama, who, desiring offspring, “worshipped through *samādhi yoga* and *kriyā yoga* Hari, who fulfills the desires of those devoted to Him” (III.21.7). He notes that Kardama’s case is exceptional, however, in that he was ordered to beget progeny by Brahmā and thus dutifully adopted this desire in order to comply with this request, not out of any personal inclination (*anu* 225).
108. The sense here is that because of poor deeds performed in the past, a person’s intelligence is limited or deluded as a consequence and confounded even in his or her motives for approaching *Īśvara*.
109. Jīva in fact introduces a further tripartite schema in the *Bhakti Sandarbha* consisting of three divisions of “devotion mixed with *karma*” (*karma-miśrā bhakti*). In addition to *sa-kāmā bhakti*, and *kaivalya-kāmā bhakti*, he mentions *bhakti-mātra kāmā*, the adoption of *karma* or *jñāna* practices, but now with a desire for devotion alone. This third group, which performs a mixed type of devotion, *bhakti-mātra kāmā*, also mixes *karma* or *jñāna* elements with its *bhakti*, but unlike the other two performers of *bhakti*, this third group does so with the intention of developing pure devotion and not for the standard fruits associated with *karma* or *jñāna*. Jīva exemplifies this with a passage, which we will find in the Teachings of Lord Kapila, where we see practices associated with *karma* and *jñāna* mixed in with some of the nine processes of *bhakti* (III.29.15–19).
110. This type of *bhakti* is exemplified by Jīva with the following prescription: “Residing in an isolated place, with mind made pure by contemplating Me, the sage should meditate on that non-dual *ātman* as being non-different from Me” (XI.18.21).
111. See, for instance, *Gītā* (VI.45).
112. As Rūpa notes in *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant II.309, Vallabha was a contemporary of Caitanya, and his followers established a lineage extant today as the Vallabha *saṁpradāya*.
113. This is a reference to one of the five types of liberation, *sārūpya*, that will be discussed in the chapter “The Object of *Bhakti*: *Īśvara*, *Bhagavān*, *Brahman*, and Divine Hierarchies.”
114. See *Brahma Saṁhitā* 43 and Sanātana Gosvāmī’s *Bṛhad-Bhāgavatāmṛta*.
115. This has some overlap with Plato’s analogy of the cave.
116. The inference here is a cause-and-effect argument: whatever is present in the effect must be present in the cause; living beings, who are effects of some cause, have personalities, qualities, and forms, therefore it is at least logically defensible to propose that their cause must also have a personality, qualities, and form. In Indian philosophy, this is called the *satkarya* principle, typical of Sāṅkhya metaphysics, but also of Vedānta, albeit differently construed. (There are schools, however, that refute these principles: Nyāya, Vaiśeṣikā, and Mīmāṃsā, upholding an *a-satkaryavāda* metaphysics: effects are distinct entities, the products of numerous causes.)

117. In particular, the sixteenth-century lineages stemming from Caitanya and Vallabha, as also the earlier Vaiṣṇava theologian Nimbārka.
118. A curt mention is made that Kṛṣṇa is worshipped there by the Vedic hymns.
119. We can contrast this with the term “sport” or even “game,” which might contain a suggestion of drivenness or competition. The term *līlā* first surfaces in literary sources in the *Vedānta Sūtras* II.1.33, where we find the author addressing an opposing atheistic view that if there really were a God who is in possession of everything, He would not need to create, because people create in order to attain possession of something they do not already have. The *Sūtras*’ response to this is that “just as [one finds] in the world, it [creation] is merely *līlā* (play).” The commentators on this verse compare God with a king who, although completely fulfilled, plays as an act of spontaneity, simply from fullness of spirit and not out of some unfulfilled need.
120. See X.23.37, X.45.44, X.52.36, and X.58.37.
121. Nevertheless, X.33.23 tells us that although Kṛṣṇa is *svarati*, “one whose pleasure is self-contained,” He still takes pleasure from His *līlā*, as do those devoted to Him—the residents of Vraj, including the livestock (X.23.36); the cowherd boys who accompany Him on His adventures in the forests (X.12.3); and the elderly *gopīs* who enjoy themselves watching and laughing at His childhood antics (X.8.24).
122. See X.14.44, X.51.46, and X.70.28.
123. See, for example, X.40.23; *Gītā* VII.14. As in Hindu philosophical discourse in general, the bonds of illusion are typically articulated in terms of attachment to one’s body, home, wealth, spouse, and offspring (X.4 8.27, X.60.52, and X.63.40).
124. See X.11.2ff., X.16.14, X.20.2, X.42.22, and X.61.2.
125. See X.12.27–28, X.70.47, and X.77.23, 28.
126. Kṛṣṇa does the same to His real parents, Vasudeva and Devakī, after they too become aware of His supremacy (X.45.1).
127. See the poetry of the sixteenth-century Sūr Dāsa for masterful juxtapositions of *līlā* with periodic reminders as to His majesty (Hawley 2009).
128. The partial exception is some of the left-handed Tantra traditions, touched upon later.
129. See *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* III.2.2; *Yoga Sūtras* II.12–15; *Gītā* V.22 and throughout.
130. For an earlier expression of this directed toward Śiva, see *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* VI.21–23.
131. Since *saṁskāras* are made of the *sattva guṇa*, discussed later, which also underpins not only the psychic makeup of an individual (the *citta*), but all gross physical objects, along with the other two *guṇas*, *rajas* and *tamas*, Yoga psychology is also, in a sense, metaphysics. There is no duality between the mind and matter in terms of their ultimate constitution (the dualism in Yoga and Vedānta is between consciousness on the one hand and mind and matter on the other, not, as with the Greco-Christian or Cartesian model, between consciousness and mind on the one hand and matter on the other).
132. We can note here that any form of recognition of an object requires that the object be already known and, hence, a memory. Thus, to recognize, in our example, the chocolate in the shop window in the first place, one must already have a preexisting *saṁskāra* of the chocolate—a prior experience of it. That *saṁskāra* may have positive or negative valences associated with it. If pleasant, the *saṁskāra* can morph into *rāga*, and if unpleasant, *dveṣa* (*Yoga Sūtras* II.8).
133. See introduction, note 49, for Kṛṣṇa as *viṣaya* (sense object).
134. Technically, *rāgānugā* imitates *rāgātmikā*, discussed below (Eastern Quadrant II.270).
135. This verse is in fact spoken by the incarnation Kapila, whom we will encounter within.
136. Rūpa defines *bhāva* somewhat technically “as a special state of pure *sattva*, which softens the mind with a taste [for Kṛṣṇa], like a ray of the sun of love (*prema*)” (III.1). The word for

- “taste” here is *ruci*, which is more or less synonymous with *bhāva*, which in turn is synonymous with *rati*, “attraction” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant III.13).
137. *Mamatā*. In this state of “my-ness,” the *bhakta*’s intimate absorption in intense thoughts of God causes a feeling that one belongs exclusively to God, and God to oneself as “my” son, “my” friend, and so on.
138. *Anarthas* (which are the equivalent of Patāñjali’s *kleśas*).
139. Rūpa uses the term “taste” (*ruci*) here, which he associates with *bhāva* in *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant III.2. (Given this, I substituted *bhāva* so as to avoid overloading the reader with a plethora of Sanskrit terms and synonyms.)
140. See *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant III.6. “After appearing in the mind’s activities (*vyrttis*), *bhāva* follows the natural inclination of the mind. It appears as if it has been manifest [by the mind], but it is actually self-manifesting” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant III.4; see Haberman 2003 for discussion following Jīva’s commentary on Rūpa). Kṛṣṇa’s various *śakti* powers are an extensive esoteric topic beyond the scope of this discussion.
141. *Bhāva* can also be the product of past-life *saṃskāra* (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Southern Quadrant V.38). On a related note, *prema* can be experienced either with awareness of *Īśvara*’s majesty or in the form of what Rūpa calls *kevalā bhakti*, “exclusive devotion” devoid of such awareness (that is, thinking of Kṛṣṇa as one’s friend, child, or lover, under the influence of *yogamāyā*; *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant IV.11). The former is generally for those following the path of *vaidhī*, and the latter corresponds to the mind-set of the *rāgānugā bhaktas* (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant IV.14).
142. See *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant III.2.
143. See *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant IV.17.
144. The usage of the term *rasa* in a *yogic* context goes back to the brilliant Kaśmīr Śaivite theologian Abhinavagupta (see Haberman 1988 for discussion).
145. There are also seven other secondary *rasas*, outlined in the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Southern Quadrant fifth wave), which need not detain us here.
146. *Kaivalya-kāmā bhakti*.
147. The term here is *asamprajñāta samādhi*. See *Yoga Sūtras* I.18 for *asamprajñāta samādhi*, also known as *nirbīja* (I.51), the state where consciousness is immersed exclusively in its own nature, devoid of any and all other objects (I.3).
148. Reference not given. Here the term *nirvikalpa* is used as a synonym of *asamprajñāta samādhi* and *nirbīja samādhi*. Still other terms include *kaivalya*, *ātma-jñāna*, and the more generic terms *mokṣa* and *mukti*.
149. See, for instance, *Gītā* X.12 and IX.27 in conjunction with XII.16–18.
150. These terms are all synonyms, and there are numerous other terms for the generic-liberated state, which are less frequently encountered (*nirvāṇa* was a term used by all the *mokṣa* traditions in the earlier period, such as in *Gītā* V.26 and VI.15, even as it became associated with Buddhism in later times).

151. In Patañjali's terms, *draṣṭuḥ svarūpe 'vasthānam*, "the seer abiding in its own nature" (*Yoga Sūtras* I.2).
152. He states this in his commentary to this verse of his uncle's work.
153. See Haberman (1994).
154. For a good accessible secondary source on *madhura bhakti*, see Schweig (2005).
155. We noted previously that the residents of *Vaikuṇṭha* and *Goloka* have bodies and forms made of *Brahman* rather than of the *guṇas* of *prakṛti*; this includes the minds of the inhabitants: these too are made of *Brahman* (see X.13.54 in part 3). This will be discussed further later.
156. Therefore, when *rāgātmika bhaktas* engage in any of the nine processes of *vaidhī bhakti* such as hearing, chanting, or remembering, they do so spontaneously and naturally and not in the form of a prescribed discipline or cultivated practice.
157. These *bhaktas*, of course, possess the requisite attainments from past-life *bhakti* practices in this material realm.
158. As we will see, Kṛṣṇa is born in a cowherding community.
159. For an excellent discussion of this phenomenon, see Haberman (1988).
160. The text would have been heard orally in premodern times rather than read. Prior to the advent of the printing press, the *Bhāgavata*, as with the entire *Purāṇa* tradition, would have been orally transmitted. Only a relatively few *brāhmaṇa* scholars would have had access to costly written manuscripts, reproduced individually by hand, often under the patronage of a king.
161. The verse states that the *yamas*, moral principles, are *sārva-bhaumā*, "universal," which is an absolute term that needs no further qualification. That Patañjali proceeds to qualify them by specifying birth, place, time, and condition as nongrounds for anyone angling for exceptions is redundant and therefore out of place and technically anomalous in the curt minimalism of the *sūtra* genre. It therefore represents emphasis, unusual for Patañjali but underscoring his commitment to the indispensability of *yama* practices.
162. It is only left-handed Tantra that proposes socially taboo behavior can be undermined in spiritual practice. But even then, this is done in a highly ritualized and meditative environment that seeks to transcend individualized notions of selfhood and the dualities of good and bad perceived through that egoistic, individualized state. Such environments quickly weed out those adopting the practice to enjoy mundane sensuality predicated on misidentifying with the ego (*ahankāra*) that classical Tantra also seeks to transcend, just like all other *yoga* traditions. Much of what is being peddled and consumed under the name of Tantra in the modern West is, from the perspective of the premodern textual Tantra traditions, simply foolishness.
163. For an examination of this recondite area of philosophy, free will, and agency in various Indic philosophical traditions, including that of the *Gauḍīya* tradition, see Dasti and Bryant (2014).
164. There are five types of liberation listed in *Vaiṣṇava* sources such as the *Bhāgavata*, one of which is *sāyūjya*, "merging," also known as *sāmyam*, the fourth type of liberation. *Sāyūjya* is not, in fact, acceptable to *bhaktas*, as it does not accommodate service. There are two types of *sāyūjya*, *brahma-sāyūjya* and *Bhagavat-sāyūjya*, described in the *Prīti-sandarbhā* (anu 15). In *Bhagavat-sāyūjya*, the *ātman* enters into Kṛṣṇa's body and remains there, relishing the bliss of Kṛṣṇa's body, as is the case with Agha here. *Jīva* does not approve of either type of *sāyūjya*, as they do not accommodate service, but considers *Bhagavat-sāyūjya* the worse of the two because one is trying to enjoy *Bhagavān* rather than serve (my thanks to Satyanārāyaṇa Dāsa for this reference). On a related note, Rūpa comments that from the five types of liberation, those of the absorbed enemy and the loving *bhakta* are not actually

identical: “The enemies of Hari usually merge into *Brahman*, but some, attaining a semblance of *sārūpya* liberation (achieving the same form as *Īśvara*), become immersed in happiness” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant II.279). He also adds that just as the sun ray resembles the sun but is a far lesser entity, so *Brahman* resembles Kṛṣṇa but is obviously quantitatively and qualitatively far inferior (Eastern Quadrant II.278). The verses indicating that the enemies and friends of Kṛṣṇa both attain the same destination are to be understood similarly.

165. Specifically, in this case, from the five types mentioned in the previous note, the type of liberation Kāṁsa attained was *sārūpya*, having the same form as the Lord.
166. *Bhāgavata* VII.1.15–25; *Gītā* VII.12–13; *Yoga Sūtras* I.25.
167. After all, our notions of our universe are nothing other than the range of our awareness of it (and hence this awareness of it keeps expanding as the instruments channeling our awareness become more sophisticated).
168. According to the *Gītā* (VIII.6), whatever state of mind one is absorbed in at the moment of death conditions the next life.
169. Jīva, and indeed the *Bhāgavata* itself, frequently uses this principle of *kaimuṭya*: “If *x* is the case, what then to speak of *y*” (which would be much more obviously the case).
170. The Soma ritual was one of the most important Vedic rituals (even as, long before the earliest extant commentator’s Sāyaṇa’s time in the fourteenth century, no one knew exactly what plant corresponded to the *soma* mentioned in the early texts). Lower castes such as dog-eaters would not normally have been permitted near the sacred sacrificial premises in pre-*bhakti* Vedic orthopraxy.
171. See note 29 in “The Practices of *Bhakti*” on Āryan.
172. Jīva finds this verse quoted by the Vaiṣṇava theologian Madhva (verse reference not given, *anu* 320).
173. This far surpasses the *Gītā*’s statement that women, normally marginalized in mainstream Vedic ritualistic orthopraxis, and excluded in Vedāntic textual studies, could also attain the “supreme destination” (IX.32), a statement that was itself radical for the time.
174. *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* II.301–302. Reference not given.

The Practitioner of *Bhakti*, the *Bhakta*

1. There are twelve *mahājanas*, literally “great people,” or exemplar *bhaktas* enumerated in the *Bhāgavata* (VI.3.20–21). Prahlāda, in this verse, is in fact behaving as an exemplar—posing as an everyday person overwhelmed by mental defects—since his mind was actually always fixed on Viṣṇu and transcendent to the base qualities he mentions here.
2. See XII.7 and XVIII.56, 58, 62.
3. See II.45, and as early as *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (III.20).
4. See also X.33.39.
5. Compare this with *kriyā yoga* “weakening” the *kleśas*, rather than completely eradicating them (*Yoga Sūtras* II.2).
6. See *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* VI.21; *Mokṣadharmā śānti parvan* 250.10 and 306.19–22; *Yoga Sūtras* I.3, III.55, and IV.34; *Gītā* II.29, IX.1–2, and XI.54.
7. *Bhagavat-tattva-vijñāna*.
8. *Daṇḍa-vat*, like a stick, is full prostrations on the ground, with arms extended in front full length.
9. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* II.20.
10. Jīva states that from the three sources of knowledge accepted by most schools (for example, *Yoga Sūtras* I.7; *Sāṅkhya Kārikā* 4), the study of scripture removes the doubt about whether Truth can be realized; reason and argument, the doubts pertaining to opposing points of view; and personal experience, the doubt as to whether one is qualified to realize the Truth (*anu* 16).
11. There are numerous verses in this regard: “Bondage cannot exist after seeing *sādhus*, who see everything with equanimity and whose selves are dedicated to Me [Kṛṣṇa], just as darkness cannot exist in the eyes of a person after seeing the sun” (X.10.41); and, again, “Let me always have the association of those great pure-hearted devotees, who are constantly immersed in devotion to You, O unlimited One. With this, I will become intoxicated with drinking the nectar of the narrations about You, and easily cross over the ocean of material existence, brimming with grave dangers” (IV.9.11).
12. As Prahlāda noted earlier, Nārada is another of the twelve *mahājanas*, the only twelve beings who fully understand *bhakti* (VI.3.20–22).
13. Ascetics eat one meal a day. Eating the remnants of their food, *prasādam*, is considered purifying, a reflection of the purity of saints.
14. For example, the Mīmāṃsā tradition established that one can determine the primary intention behind a text, even if it appears to contain conflicting or contradictory passages, by considering six criteria of the text: its opening and closing statements; its repetition of a subject; extraordinary statements made in it; results to be attained promoted by it; its glorification of a subject; and logical argumentation undertaken by the text to support some conclusion. Of course, as an aside, such criteria did not prevent profound differences in interpretation and the subsequent formation of numerous Vedānta lineages, as we will see.
15. Jīva here offers this *Bhāgavata* quote in support of those who experience spontaneous attraction: “From association with saints, realization of my power arises. These narratives of my activities become pleasing to the ears and the heart. By enjoying them, faith, love, and devotion quickly manifest consecutively on the path to liberation” (III.25.25). He contrasts

this with the limitations of study: “Neither gods nor mortals, who have beginnings and ends, understand You, O most famous Lord. Considering this, those whose intelligence is pure abandon study of the Vedic texts” (VII.9.49).

16. Termed *sthita-dhī*, or *sthita-prajñā*, in the second chapter of the *Gītā*.
17. Arjuna’s question in the second chapter, using the language of the Vedānta philosophical tradition, is raised again in chapter 14, using the language of Sāṅkhya, with essentially the same response reworded accordingly.
18. *Rati-rasa*.
19. See also I.18.13.
20. While this strikes us as a sexist comment in our modern day and age, as is the case with *Gītā* IX.32, we should remember that in Vedic orthopraxy, women were not allowed to study the sacred texts and could participate in Vedic rituals only in a secondary, passive role (Jamieson 1996), while laborers (*śūdras*) were barred from all such contexts. Likewise with formal lineage-embedded Vedānta study, traditionally an exclusive male preserve. *Bhakti* is thus an equalizer in gender as in social hierarchies and was socially revolutionary for its time (see *Bhāgavata* I.4.25 for an expression of this).
21. See Haberman (1994) for a premodern example of scandal in the Krishna tradition.
22. The *yamas* are listed and discussed in *Yoga Sūtras* II.30–45 as *ahimsā*, nonviolence; *satya*, truthfulness; *brahmacarya*, celibacy; *asteya*, nonstealing; and *aparigraha*, noncoveting. The *niyamas* are listed as *śauca*, cleanliness; *santoṣa*, contentment; *tapas*, austerity; *svādhyāya*, study and *mantra* recitation; and *Īśvara-praṇidhāna*, surrender to *Īśvara*.
23. Rūpa in verse 262 here is quoting the *Skanda Purāṇa*, reference not given.
24. For a critique of the *guru* culture in a modern Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava expression, ISKCON (the Hare Krishna Movement), see relevant articles in Bryant and Ekstrand (2004). A few simple key word searches will bring up a plethora of scandals associated with numerous *guru* figures representing Eastern spirituality in the modern period.
25. *Sama-cittāḥ*. *Gītā* II.48 defines *yoga* itself with a form of the same adjective used here: *samatvam yogam ucyate*, *yoga* is equanimity.
26. Compare with *Yoga Sūtras* I.3.
27. Compare with *Gītā* V.8–9.
28. There are three types of *karma* accepted by the Yoga school: *sañcita*, already accumulated in the past and lying latent, awaiting its fructification in a future life; *sañciyamāna*, ongoing (that is, being continuously accumulated in the present); and the type noted here, *prārabdha*. This latter category refers to *karma* that was activated at the moment of birth for this particular lifetime (the *jāti*, *āyur*, and *bhoga*, “family/species of birth, life span, and quality of life” of *Yoga Sūtras* I.13–14) and thus already set in motion. While the former two types of *karma* are annulled upon enlightenment, the *prārabdha* continues for the duration of that final life. In the *Sāṅkhya Kārikā*, the analogy of the potter’s wheel is used to illustrate this already activated *karma*: even when the potter takes his or her foot off the wheel, it will not immediately stop spinning owing to the kinetic energy already invested in it (LXVII). Likewise, if a person becomes enlightened in the middle of a lifetime, the remnant of the *karma* already accrued for that lifetime will still run its course.
29. This is a reference to one of the implements Viṣṇu holds in His four arms, along with the conch shell, club, and lotus.
30. Although often associated with Buddhism, these were generic: the Buddhist *Samyutta Nikāya* and *Samyukta Āgama* acknowledge that these were followed by non-Buddhist schools (Bronkhurst 1993, 93).
31. This term was widely used by the *ātman* traditions before becoming associated in later times more exclusively with Buddhism (see, for instance, *Gītā* V.24–26 and VI.15).

32. As a point of fact, as we will discuss later, the Sāṅkhya tradition posits bliss not as an attribute of the *ātman*, but as an absence of suffering (which might appear blissful to one newly released from pain). But here, too, it is the intellect that quibbles over such things.
33. Although the *Vedānta Sūtras* limit this by noting that only *Īśvara* can create universes, the *ātman* cannot (IV.4.17); likewise, so do the *Yoga Sūtras* in the statement that *Īśvara*'s omniscience is unsurpassed (I.25). Thus, the liberated soul's omnipotency and omniscience cannot surpass that of *Īśvara*.
34. We will encounter several descriptions of these divine forms in part 2. For instance: "These attendants have brilliant dark hues, and lotus-petal eyes. They wear yellowish garments and have extremely attractive and beautiful forms. They are effulgent and decorated with the choicest ornaments and medallions of brilliant flawless gems. Their complexions are of coral, gems, or lotus fiber. They wear dazzling necklaces, crowns, and garlands." (II.6.11)
35. Jīva in *Bhakti Sandarbha* anu 234 and Rūpa in Eastern Quadrant II.55.
36. Keeping in mind here that in Vaiṣṇavism the *ātman* is an eternal part, *aṁśa*, of the whole (*Gītā* XV.7 and references from the *Vedānta Sūtras* in I.4n81).
37. As we touched upon earlier, this latter possibility was the liberation attained by some of Kṛṣṇa's enemies in the tenth book. See, for instance, X.12.33, X.74–75, and X.78.9–10.
38. For an example of this, see Mārkaṇḍadeva's *Śiva-jñāna-bodha* XI; and Appayya Dikṣita's *Śivādvaita-Nirṇaya* 3.2355. See also Law and Palmer, 56.
39. *Nija-iṣṭa*.
40. Gopīparāṇadhana Dāsa (2002). This section of the text recounts the travels of Gopa-Kumāra through various realms of the universe and then beyond, into the transcendent realms within *Brahman*.
41. For primary sources here, see the *Devī Gītā*, the *Devī Bhāgavata*, and the *Devī Mahātmya*; for secondary sources, Brooks (1990, 1992).
42. See *Gītā* XII.1–4, XIV.27, XV.16–20.

The Object of *Bhakti*: *Īśvara*, *Bhagavān*, *Brahman*, and Divine Hierarchies

1. See *Sāṅkhya Kārikā* I.1. Also see *Nyāya Sūtra* I.1.9 and 22; *Vaiśeṣikā Sūtras* V.16; *Gītā* VIII.15; and as early as the *Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* III.7.23 and IV.4.14. See Bryant 2003, 210ff., for the distribution of these four truths throughout chapter 2 of the *Yoga Sūtras*. They also occur elsewhere, including *Āyurveda* (there is disease, disease has a cause, there is a state free of disease, there is a means to attain this state free of disease).
2. While *duḥkham* is typically translated as suffering, it can mean any sort of mental in addition to physical suffering. I prefer to translate the term as “unfulfilling” since it is perhaps easier to recognize the lack of deep-level fulfillment as being *sarvam*—pertaining to everything one does (when in a state of ignorance of the true self).
3. I use the term “Vedic-affiliated” for schools, such as Yoga, Sāṅkhya, Vedānta, and the *bhakti* traditions, that lay claim to roots in the Upaniṣads, even though they are technically post-Vedic. I qualify the Vedic schools here because Buddhist traditions do not accept an autonomous *ātman* (with the possible exception of an early *pudgala* school). The problems with using the alternative term “Hindu” are well-known (it is a term introduced by invaders, rather than an indigenous label—as an aside, the first time the term surfaces in Indic sources is in the hagiography of Śrī Caitanya, Rūpa’s own teacher). Nonetheless, the term “Hindu” can be used for ease of reference, given its by now irretractable prevalence.
4. The *ātman* is the innermost self, pure consciousness, distinct from both the psychic overlay of mind and its gross material embodiment.
5. For easily accessible primary sources on these basic points, see *Dhammapada* (for instance, 1, 3, 16, and throughout); *Yoga Sūtras* (chapter 2, especially II.2–26); and *Gītā* (II.62–66, V.22ff., and throughout).
6. See, for example, *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* II.22 and VI.13ff.; *Yoga Sūtras* II.29; *Gītā* VI.27–28.
7. As in the *Gītā* (IV.1–2, XV.15), Kṛṣṇa claims to be the origin of all these paths.
8. It may sometimes also lead to a motivated type of *bhakti* that will be discussed later, such as that associated with the role of *Īśvara* in the *Yoga Sūtras* (I.23–28). See the author’s commentary on *Yoga Sūtras* I.23–24 for discussion.
9. See XV.16–20, XIV.27.
10. “Of what use are the sacred texts, austerities (*tapas*), the powers of speech, the control of mind (*citta-vṛtti*), keen intelligence, and strong senses? Of what use is the practice of *yoga*, or *sāṅkhya* (knowledge), the celibate vow of *sannyāsa*, or study of scripture and recitation of *mantra* (*svādhyāya*)? And what use are other attainments, unless they are offered to Hari [Kṛṣṇa]?” (IV.31.11–12).
11. The term *Īśvara* is already used five times by the *Atharva-Veda*, circa 1000 B.C.E., and has valences of lordship in the oldest texts. See Shastri (1935) for a history of the term with relation to theism.
12. From the classical schools of philosophy, the Mīmāṃsā school rejects the inferential necessity of positing an *Īśvara*. Sāṅkhya is typically (and hastily) assumed to be nontheistic, as the later *Sāṅkhya Kārikā* does not mention *Īśvara* (an assumption that can be brought into question—see, for instance, Edgerton 1924). But there were many schools of Sāṅkhya, most of which, preserved in the Purāṇas and *Mokṣadharmā* section of the *Mahābhārata*, were in fact theistic (although the much later *Sāṅkhya Sūtra* is more explicitly nontheistic). There

were thus both theistic and nontheistic Sāṅkhya strains, with—I would argue as others have done—the majority theistic.

13. See also *Bhāgavata* I.2.36 and III.24.32.
14. The *d* and *ta* endings on these two texts, respectively, reflect Sanskrit grammatical endings of the term *Bhagavān*, which is in the masculine, nominative case of the stem *bhagavat* (grammatically *bhaga* + *vat* possessive suffix = literally “one who possesses qualities”). *Bhaga* is an old Vedic term, used to refer to the share apportioned to the various gods in the Vedic *yajña*, sacrifice. By the Purāṇas, it becomes coupled with the possessive suffix and denotes the superexcellent qualities of a transcendent Being.
15. The terms can even, on occasion, be used figuratively for a powerful person (such as a sage like Nārada).
16. The term has earlier Vedic roots associated with the power of the sacrifice. The root is *brh*, to grow, increase, expand.
17. See, for example, *Kena Upaniṣad* I.1–6.
18. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* II.3.1–2. Since “being” is a present active participle (of the root *as*)—that is, a never-ending ongoing state—*sat* is often translated as “eternal.”
19. See *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* 4.3.32; *Chāndogya* VI.2.1; *Taittirīya* II.2.1 and II.8; *Muṇḍaka* II.1.7. Also, as a technical aside, *advaita Vedānta*, in its radical nondualism, would not speak of the “qualities” of *Brahman*, as this implies a duality between qualities (*dharma*s/*guṇa*s) and quality bearers (such as substances, *dharmin*s/*guṇin*s/*dravya*s). For this school, the inherent nature of *Brahman* is itself *sat-cit-ānanda*; it has no qualities.
20. See, for example, *Muṇḍaka* I.6–7.
21. See, for example, *Taittirīya* II.6; *Aitareya* I.1ff.; *Śvetāśvatara* I.8ff.
22. We will provide examples below.
23. Such schools point to verses such as the famous *sātmātattvam asi*, “you are that *ātman*,” series of verses in the *Chāndogya* (VI.9ff.) and *Kaṭha*, “from death to death he goes, who sees here any kind of diversity” (IV.10–11; repeated from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* IV.4.19; these and translations in next note from Olivelle 1996).
24. Verses favored by such schools point to the *Śvetāśvatara*, such as I.6 and 9. Rāmānuja frequently quotes verses such as “The self of yours who is present within but is different from all beings, whom all beings do not know, whose body is all beings, and who controls all beings from within—he is the inner controller [*antaryāmin*], the immortal” (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka* III.7.21); “He had this desire, ‘Let me multiply myself, let me produce offspring’” (*Taittirīya* II.6); and “It thought to itself, ‘Let me become many’” (*Chāndogya* VI.2.3).
25. This can be readily seen by the *tilak*, sacred clay forehead marking, on pictures of Krishnamacarya, as well as on early photos of Iyengar, which denotes the school of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, the formal name of Rāmānuja’s lineage (the philosophical name is *viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta*). I personally asked Iyengar, on his last tour to the West, whether he still identified with Rāmānuja’s Vedānta lineage, Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, and whether he considered *Īśvara* to be Nārāyaṇa/Viṣṇu, as per the very specific theology of this lineage. He immediately and unambiguously replied in the affirmative. Since I was receiving a lot of requests to conduct yoga philosophy workshops in Iyengar yoga communities, I then asked him whether he wished for me to teach his students the *viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta* position (which will be discussed later in this section) on fundamental Vedānta issues pertaining to *Īśvara*, *Brahman*, the *ātman*, and *bhakti*. He replied in the affirmative, then added that I should also teach them Śaṅkara’s *advaita Vedānta* and all different points of view (personal communication in the Harvard Faculty Club, 2005). I very much appreciated this response.
26. This is especially central to the later Upaniṣads such as the *Śvetāśvatara*, but emerging

already in the earlier ones, too.

27. This is called *āgama*, as in *Yoga Sūtras* I.7, or, more commonly, *śabda* or *śruti/smṛti* (or just *śāstra*, as in *Vedānta Sūtras* I.1.3). Vedānta also employs reason and arguments secondarily, which occupy the second of the four chapters of the *Vedānta Sūtras*.
28. See *Yoga Sūtras* I.7 for a discussion of the three modes of gaining right knowledge according to Yoga, including *anumāna* and *āgama*. For an excellent overview of Nyāya theism in both primary and secondary sources, see Dāsti (2010) and references therein, and Patil (2009).
29. For primary sources, see *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, *ādi līlā*, chapter 10, and *Caitanya Bhāgavata*, *ādi khaṇḍa*, chapter 13; for secondary sources, see Ganeri (2011, chapter 4).
30. *Yoga Sūtras* I.24; *Gītā* 15.17.
31. This would be the Vaiṣṇava reading of, for example, *Gītā* XIV.27.
32. See I.4.20–22.
33. Or, with the Vedāntin Madhva (and also the Nyāya school), *Īśvara* is at least accepted as the overseer, sustainer, and support of *prakṛti*, which is not created but coeternal with Him.
34. As with the cluster of Yoga traditions, there were numerous variants of Sāṅkhya, amply attested to in the *Mahābhārata* epic (the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hsöen Tsang’s disciple in the seventh century C.E. reports eighteen schools, and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* also refers to several). Only fragments quoted by other authors have survived from the works of the original teachers of the system. The later *Sāṅkhya Kārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa, which scholars assign to the fourth to fifth century C.E., has by default become the seminal text of the tradition, just as Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtras* has become for the Yoga tradition, and represents its more developed, systematic form.
35. *Prakṛti* has been called “the undifferentiated plenitude of being” (Larson 1979, 167).
36. *Sat-tva* literally means “being-ness,” from the root *as*, “to be.” *Rajas* is from the root *rañj*, “to color” or to “redden.” *Tamas* is from the root *tam*, “to choke, block, or stop.”
37. Without *rajas*, for example, one could not even blink one’s eyes, and without *tamas*, there would be no sleep or rest.
38. When the *guṇas* maintain what we might call an “equi-tension,” *prakṛti* remains in a precreative state of dynamic potential called *avyakta*. Once the equilibrium is disrupted, however, creation takes place.
39. The analogy of milk holds good only in terms of the evolution of by-products. Where *prakṛti* differs from milk is that it and its evolutes maintain their own separate identities while simultaneously producing further evolutes, unlike milk, which is itself fully transformed when producing yogurt.
40. I have specified the Vedānta and Purāṇa traditions, as there are always exceptions to categories and terminologies: Nyāya, for example, would accept an eternal, primary, and nonderivatory *Īśvara*, but the earlier tradition would likely not use the term “personal” to depict Him. For this tradition, *Īśvara* as the nonreducible “individual” *ātman* who differs from other *ātmans* in being an omniscient Overseer would be a better way to demarcate this tradition from the monist understanding (although later Naiyāyikas were Śaivite and thus “personalists” in the sense I am using the term here).
41. We define “monotheism” here as one personal and transcendent God as supreme cause.
42. In his commentary of *Yoga Sūtras* I.24, the commentator Vyāsa, in support of one Supreme *Īśvara*, quips that if the various manifestations of *Īśvaras* were all exactly equal, and one says of an object “Let it be old” and the other says “Let it be new,” the wishes of one of them will be thwarted (which would contradict the definition of *Īśvara*). And if their wishes never contradict, adds the commentator Vācaspati Miśra, then what is the point of having more than one *Īśvara* in the first place?!
43. Śaṅkara’s *Upadeśasāhasrī* is an excellent place to encounter accessible *advaita* teachings from

its most famous exponent, all the more since it is a text attributed to Śaṅkara's own composition, in contrast with his other writings, which are commentaries on other preexisting Vedānta texts. For good secondary sources, see Deutsch (1969, 1971).

44. For the enlightened state while still embodied (*jīvan-mukta*) in Śaṅkara, see Fort (1996).
45. The twelfth-century commentator Madhva is a partial (and somewhat technical) exception here. Madhva does not accept *Īśvara* as the creator of *prakṛti*, although he accepts Him as the sustainer and support of both matter and the pluralist individual souls. Madhva's philosophy is one of dualism, *dvaita*, where, along the lines of the Nyāya school, God, the souls, and matter are all eternal coexistents (rather than the latter being emanational from the former). Nonetheless, *Īśvara* is unambiguously the Supreme Controller and Overseer in his very robust form of monotheism. See Sharma (1971) and Buchta (2013).

46. For good secondary sources on Rāmānuja, see Clooney (2007), Carmen (1974), Lipner (1986), and Cari (1998). For primary sources other than his commentary on the *Vedānta Sūtras* (the Śrī Bhāṣya) and *Gītā*, see Rāmānuja's *Vedārtha Saṅgraha*.
47. I thank Matthew Dasti for this conceptualization.
48. It is in fact listed in Mādhava's fourteenth-century doxography, the *Sarvadarśanasamgraha* (see Nicholson 2010, 148ff., for discussion on the Sanskrit doxographies).
49. While the notion of "six schools" surfaces frequently in the doxographies across the centuries, different schools were identified as comprising these six, or more than six were recognized. Additionally, sometimes the schools were differentiated differently—for instance, Yoga was not deemed separate from Sāṅkhya until later times. See Nicholson (2014) for discussion.
50. Glimpses of Śākta metaphysics can be read into the Upaniṣads, which these traditions—like all others—can then point to as their roots. All Vedic traditions needed to legitimate themselves by somehow or other locating themselves in the *Śruti*, as we will find in appendix 1 with Jīva himself. From this vantage point, later traditions could then claim to be the "real" or "hidden" or "higher" teachings of the *Śruti*. The *mokṣadharma* section of the *Mahabhārata*, which predated the Common Era, and various Purāṇas contain more explicit Śākta references, so these currents are ancient. And, of course, the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (circa fourth century B.C.E.), despite being frequently quoted by Vaiṣṇava theologians owing to its dualistic and theistic orientations, is explicitly Śaivite.
51. For excellent sources on Kaśmir Śaivism, see Muller-Ortega (1989), Lawrence (1999), and Dyczkowski (1987).
52. As noted earlier, so uncompromising is this form of *advaita* that even *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda* are considered not "qualities" of *Brahman*, but its essence. A quality requires a quality bearer, or substance, in which the quality resides, hence creating a dualism between the quality and that in which it adheres. No such semblance of dualism or differentiation in *Brahman* is accepted by classical *advaita*.
53. Rāmānuja never mentions the *Bhāgavata*, prioritizing rather the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. We resist the proposal that this omission suggests that the *Bhāgavata* must have been written after Rāmānuja's time in the twelfth century. We prefer to see this as a theological neglect stemming from, precisely, discomfort with the *Bhāgavata*'s prioritization of Kṛṣṇa over Viṣṇu.
54. The Gauḍīya lineage traces its own pedigree (but not without contestation) to Madhva. This connection is not recognized by the orthodox Madhva tradition, however (see De 1986, 13ff.).
55. As in English negations like theist/atheist, an *a-* prefix negates the noun to which it is attached.
56. Where Rāmānuja tends to agree with Śaṅkara at least regarding the identification of the source Upaniṣadic text being referred to in any particular Vedānta *sūtra*, Madhva frequently identifies completely different source texts, even as his philosophy is very much closer to the former than the latter. See Adams (1993) for a comparative analysis of these three pivotal thinkers on the first chapter of the *Vedānta Sūtras*.
57. We take this usage from Dasgupta (1922, 246).
58. Madhva's ontology draws heavily from Nyāya categories.
59. The Nimbarka tradition has a commentary and calls its philosophy *dvaita-advaita*; Vallabha, a contemporary of Caitanya, did likewise for his *śuddha-advaita* philosophy; and most recently, the followers of the eighteenth-century Swami Nārāyaṇa tradition have just completed a commentary for the philosophy of their lineage, called *navya-viśiṣṭa-advaita*.
60. This trans-human status is irrespective of whether, as with Nyāya and the theistic traditions,

the texts are authored and bestowed by *Īśvara* at the beginning of creation or, as with the nontheistic Mīmāṃsā school, the texts are authorless but nonetheless eternal.

61. Part of the Vedānta project, as an important aside, is to prove that the overarching primary subject matter of the Upaniṣads ultimately relates to *Brahman* rather than some other topic (I.3).
62. Like the *Yoga Sūtras*, many *sūtras* consist of only three or four words. They rarely indicate to which passage, section, or phrase in the Upaniṣads they refer and thus are completely inaccessible without commentary.
63. Precise labels are slightly problematic here since Śaṅkara could, in point of fact, be considered a type of Vaiṣṇava (even as some narratives place him as an incarnation of Śiva), but along the lines noted above—in other words, he accepted in terms of conventional reality that the creator is Viṣṇu (in, for instance, his *Gītā* commentary), but that in ultimate reality both creation and creator are products of ignorance (see Nelson 2007 for an excellent discussion here). Moreover, since Rāmānuja's Vedānta school is called *viśiṣṭa-advaita*, “qualified nondualism,” it has retained the term *advaita*, since everything is an expression of the one *Brahman*, but qualified it by positing differences within it, *viśiṣṭa*, along the lines noted previously. The terms “personalist” and “nonpersonalist” have similar sorts of problems.
64. This divisioning is seen in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Śaṅkara's *param-guru*, Gauḍapāda, was either a Buddhist or heavily influenced by Buddhism (for discussion, see King 1995).
65. The standard primary Vedānta texts—the *prasthāna traya*, threefold corpus—consist of the Upaniṣads, the *Vedānta Sūtras*, and the *Gītā*.
66. The *Padma Purāṇa* states: “When *Īśvara* is described as *nirguṇa*, without qualities, what is meant is an absence of the *guṇas* connected with *prakṛti* like inferior objects” (*uttara-khaṇḍa* 255.39–40).
67. There are much less fundamental but still important variations, too, within post-Śaṅkara expressions of *advaita*, as among the Vaiṣṇava schools (see Karl H. Potter, ed., *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 11: “Advaita Vedanta from 800 to 1200: From Vacaspati Misra to Citsuka.” [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006]).
68. The Swami Nārāyaṇa tradition, originating in Gujarat in the eighteenth century, has, at the time of this writing, recently completed its own commentary on the *Vedānta Sūtras* (Ahmedabad: Swaminarayan Aksharpath, 2009). This school calls its philosophy *navya-viśiṣṭa-advaita*, a “new” variant of Rāmānuja's philosophy (indeed, their monks are often trained in philosophy and logic by *viśiṣṭādvaita* Vaiṣṇava theologians).
69. Nyāya (the school of logicians) argues vigorously contra *advaita Vedānta* for both the *ātman* and *Īśvara* as eternally independent and individual “reals” (which they term *padārthas*, things that can be named because of having inherent existence), and as discussed, even the monistic Kāśmīr Śaivite tradition rejects Śaṅkara's illusionism when it comes to the world of forms, which they hold to be real *citi-śakti*.
70. There are 150 dense pages in Thibaut's translation (1904). Madhva also vigorously opposed Śaṅkara, as did the great *bhakta* scholar and theologian Vallabha, a contemporary of Caitanya.
71. We can briefly touch upon one commonly encountered argument Jīva raises against the *advaita* position (so as not to burden here those less interested in Vedānta argumentation), in order to give a flavoring of this issue through Vaiṣṇava theological sensitivities. The first argument he introduces against the *advaita* position in his *Bhakti Sandarbha* is the most commonly encountered in anti-*advaita* argumentation and, as with so much else, can be traced back at least to the twelfth-century Vedānta theologian Rāmānuja. If it is true, as *advaita* holds, that there is in ultimate reality (*paramārthika*) only one undivided *Brahman*,

whose nature is *cit*, pure consciousness, but that owing to *māyā/avidyā* (ignorance), the *ātman* is erroneously perceived as different from it, when in fact it is nothing other than that same *Brahman*, then this is tantamount to suggesting that *Brahman* can fall under the influence of illusion. As Rāmānuja puts it: “*Kasyā avidyā*,” Whose is this ignorance? Where is its locus? Is ignorance somehow covering *Brahman*? This is constitutionally impossible, as *Brahman*’s very nature is *cit*, full awareness: it can never be unaware or subject to ignorance, any more than the sun can be unilluminated. So ignorance cannot exist in *Brahman*. But nor can it be located outside of *Brahman*, as that creates a situation of *dvaita*, duality (two distinct entities), which contradicts the nonnegotiable tenet of *advaita*—absolute nonduality. Nor can it be covering the individual *ātman* since the *ātman*’s individuality is itself caused by ignorance, hence this ignorance must have existed prior to its effect of individualization. Besides, for *advaita* metaphysics, ignorance cannot be within a part of *Brahman* of any sort, for the same reason—*Brahman* has no parts, once again, because, ex hypothesi, it must only be nondual. In fact, says Jīva, the latter possibility is actually the only coherent one: there must be some sort of difference between the part of *Brahman* under the spell of *māyā*—namely, the *jīva*—and the part of *Brahman* that can never be reduced to this condition but is, in fact, the wielder of ignorance (*māyā*)—namely, *Īśvara* (*Tattva Sandarbha* anu 35–40).

The basic *advaita* response to this dilemma (and the issue has been treated differently through the history of the tradition) is that an explanation of ignorance is beyond human comprehension (*anirvācanīya*). To be fair, the Gauḍīya Vedāntins do not hesitate to resort to a similar position of inconceivability (*acintya*) when discussing their own ontology. So all this points to the obvious limitations of the human intellect in capturing Truths that, by the definition of all Vedāntins (and all *mokṣa* traditions), lie completely beyond it. Nonetheless, the debate remains an indispensable polemical mainstay of the various Vedānta communities to this day, since clearly, for Vaiṣṇavas, *bhakti yoga* requires an eternal *Īśvara* in devotional relationship with an *ātman* that is quantitatively distinct on the one hand, even as it is qualitatively the same on another (that is, also comprising *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda*). Hence the perennial effort invested in relentlessly marshaling exegetical and philosophical methods in defense of these Truths.

72. *Bhajana*, in addition to its meaning discussed in the *kīrtana* section, is sometimes more broadly used as another term for *bhakti* practice.
73. For the *Bhāgavata*, nonduality indicates that everything emanates from *Bhagavān*—nothing has separate or independent existence. *Advaya* is a synonym of *advaita* but understood by the Vaiṣṇavas very differently from Śaṅkara.
74. *Paramātman*, Supreme *Ātmān*, is another term understood variously in the Vedānta schools. For the *Bhāgavata* and Vaiṣṇava traditions, it generally refers to derivative forms of Viṣṇu involved in various levels of overlordship in the matter of creation (see I.6.29), as well as the form that manifests to *yogīs*. Rūpa quotes a verse from the *Skanda Purāṇa* stating that “*Bhagavān* is called *Paramātman* by the followers of the eight-limbed *yoga* (*aṣṭāṅga*), *Brahman* by those who follow the Upaniṣads, and *jñāna* by the *jñāna-yogīs*” (*Laghu-Bhāgavatāmṛta* I.196, reference not given; for a rearticulation of this verse, see *Bhāgavata* III.32.26).
75. See, for example, Rūpa in yet another of his publications: *Laghu-Bhāgavatāmṛta* (V.216).
76. Nyāya is an exception, here, positing that the *ātman* has consciousness as a quality, but that this quality is instantiated and manifest only when the *ātman* is coupled with a mind but remains latent when the *ātman* is liberated and uncoupled from the mind. Hence liberation for Nyāya (and its sister school, Vaiśeṣikā) is not a state of pure consciousness.
77. Indeed, Sheridan (1983) reads an “*advaitic* theism” in this text. See also Bhattacarya (1960–62), Vyasa (1974), and Rukmani (1970) for other studies on the text’s philosophy.

78. *Paramātmān* in Vaiṣṇavism is the immanent aspect of the personal Absolute consciously active within His own power of *māya-śakti*, the material world of *prakṛti* and the *guṇas*. It is God as regulator of the universe and the selves within it. Specifically, it refers to the various Viṣṇu forms. For example, there is the Mahā-Viṣṇu (Kāraṇodakaśayī), from whose pores unlimited parallel universes emanate (X.14.11, X.88.41). Unlimited derivative Viṣṇus are manifest from that Mahā-Viṣṇu and enter into each individual universe (the Kṣīrodakaśayī Viṣṇus), and it is from the navels of these Viṣṇus that the lotus grows upon which Brahmā, the secondary creator, finds himself (as we will encounter in the Tale and Teachings of Lord Brahmā). There is a further tertiary Viṣṇu who then enters into the hearts of all beings, as well as into every atom, the *Paramātmān* or *Antaryāmin*. This ontology, derived from the *Pāñcarātrika* tradition, is outlined in various sources such as the *Paramātmā Sandarbha*.
79. See also *Gītā* XIV.27 and VII.4–7ff.
80. *Draṣṭuḥ svarūpe ’vasthānam*, the seer abides in its own nature (*Yoga Sūtras* I.3), which is just pure consciousness (II.20).

81. *Amśa*, “part,” in *Gītā* XV.7 and *Vedānta Sūtras* II.3.43; *bheda*, “difference,” in *Vedānta Sūtras* I.1.17 and 21, I.2.20; and *viśeṣana*, “distinction,” in *Vedānta Sūtras* I.20.22.
82. Written *Puruṣottama* for syntactical reasons.
83. Like the obtainment of an M.Phil. for one pursuing a Ph.D.!
84. Written *Paramātmān*.
85. See, for a parallel discussion, the commentaries on the *vitārkas*, the unwanted impulses contrary to the *yamas* and *niyamas*, in *Yoga Sūtras* II.33–34.
86. Nyāya posits the liberated state as one free of suffering, rather than a more positive state of actual bliss.
87. Hence, “the poet-sages always engage in great ecstasy in *bhakti* for *Bhagavān* Vāsudeva, which satisfies the mind” (I.2.22).
88. *Draṣṭuḥ svarūpe ’vasthānam* (*Yoga Sūtras* I.3). The fifth limb of *yoga*, *pratyāhāra*, is precisely to withdraw consciousness from the senses and all sense objects, and the remaining three limbs of *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi* to totally still the mind (*Yoga Sūtras* II.49, III.1–3).
89. See VII.8.42, X.16.37, X.87.21, XI.20.34, XI.14.14, and XII.10.6.
90. See III.4.15, III.25.34, III.29.13, V.14.44, VI.18.74, and IX.4.67.
91. See IV.9.10, IV.20.24, VI.18.74, and VII.6.25.
92. See VI.11.25.
93. The commentator Viśvanātha states here that if one’s *bhakti* is not strong, one will become distracted by the mystic powers accruing from *yoga*. Like the *Yoga Sūtras* (III.37), the *Bhāgavata* considers such powers useless (XI.15.33), for reasons that should be obvious by now.
94. Although thinkers such as Madhva held that the Vedic gods were originally attributes of Viṣṇu, who became reified in their own right only after the degeneration of the ages (Madhva wrote a commentary on certain verses of the *Ṛg-Veda*). Dayānanda of the Arya Samaj was to argue something similar in much later times.
95. *Śivarātrī* has various stories associated with it.
96. Sectarian lineages are known as *saṁpradāya* or *paramparā* (for instance, see *Gītā* IV.2).
97. Sacred text is also called *āgama* (for example, in *Yoga Sūtras* I.7).
98. For instance, placing a *tulasī* leaf on all food offered to the Deity in Vaiṣṇavism.
99. The *Dina-Candrikā* was the last book published by Hari Dāsa Śāstrī, a prolific scholar and author, before he passed away in 2013 (Vṛndāvan: Śrī Gadādhara Gaurhari Press, n.d.).
100. This term is not typically used for Lakṣmī but is employed here as a play on words to parallel Śiva’s consort Umā with a view to emphasize the near identity even in nomenclature of these *Īśvaras* and *Īśvarīs*.

101. It is for these sorts of reasons that the eighteenth-century Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa wrote a commentary on the *Vedānta Sūtras* on behalf of the Gauḍīya tradition. Without this, no emerging school claiming to be representing the true teachings of the Vedas or Vedānta can be considered authoritatively grounded in the old *Śruti* (Vedic) texts (we have noted this is an ongoing expectation, with the Swami Nārāyaṇa tradition's most recent addition to the commentarial tradition).
102. See *Yoga Sūtras* I.7; *Sāṅkhya Kārikā* IV.
103. Despite the usually poorly informed references to the so-called Hindu trinity, Brahmā, the (nominal) third *Īśvara*, is a mortal being and so is never a genuine contender for the role of supreme transcendent *Īśvara*, as we will see from his tale within. Although there are Purāṇa stories where the three compete, the playful competition in the Purāṇas is between Viṣṇu and Śiva, which is resolved according to the sectarian nature of the different lineages. Brahmā, if he competes, as in the Atri story mentioned above, is merely a placeholder (see *Bhāgavata* X.89.1–20).
104. While these traditions are “later” in terms of the compositions of their textual traditions, in fact it is impossible to tell how old some of the stories they contain are or if they may have existed orally (especially if they did not feel compelled to engage in orthodox Vedic rituals or Vedāntic exegesis). In all probability they coexisted with the ancient Vedic corpus. See the *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Devī Māhātmyā*, or *Devī Gītā* as important “later” texts in the Goddess tradition.
105. For example, we have discussed how Śaiva schools follow similar bifurcations between, for instance, Kāśmīr Śaiva and Śaiva Siddhānta expressions, as to whether the form of Śiva is ultimate and supreme or derived from a higher transpersonal Truth. Likewise, there are Vaiṣṇava Śākta traditions as well as Vaiṣṇava *advaita* adherents; and one can find Śaivite Vedāntins and the like. This can all be seen as reflecting the infinite and unlimited potentiality of the Divine from the Purāṇic perspective.
106. We need not concern ourselves with the Purāṇic references associated with Brahmā, which are considered of the nature of *rajas*, for reasons offered in note 103.
107. There are some differences among Purāṇa lists as to which Purāṇas constitute the eighteen.
108. Brahmā is associated with its creation, a quality of *rajas*, but as we have noted, he is a mortal being and not in the same category as Viṣṇu and Śiva.
109. As we will see, the *Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas* associate Śiva and Brahmā with religiosity that seeks material gain (or, at best, spiritual gain mixed with materialism, as in I.2.26–27, quoted later). Hence the statement here that the ultimate good—which was established in the opening verses of the *Bhāgavata* as being free of any such motives (I.1.2 and note)—is attainable only from Viṣṇu.
110. Vedic religiosity involves a highly elaborate, technical, and expansive set of rituals, for which fire, as consumer of the oblations, is central. The metaphor indicates that fire—as actual consumer of the offerings and a form of the god Agni—is more important than wood or smoke, even as these are intertwined and inseparable.
111. We reiterate that for the Vaiṣṇava traditions, Viṣṇu's form is made not of *prakṛti*, but of *Brahman*, the *viśuddha sattva* noted here.
112. The *Harivaṁśa* is another extensive account of Kṛṣṇa's life, added as an appendage to the *Mahābhārata* epic and generally taken by scholars to be an older rendition.
113. In the *Mahābhārata*, *Harivaṁśa*, and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, there is no doubt that Kṛṣṇa is an incarnation of Viṣṇu. The roles, for the most part, have been somewhat reversed in the *Bhāgavata*: while there are abundant passages in the text that relate to Viṣṇu without explicitly subordinating him to Kṛṣṇa, particularly in the books prior to the tenth, the general thrust of the tenth book, which takes up a quarter of the entire twelve books of the

- Purāṇa, prioritizes Kṛṣṇa. The *Gītā* can also be read as prioritizing Kṛṣṇa (see VII.6–7, X.8) but is obviously not viewed this way by Rāmānuja and Madhva.
114. Rūpa identifies four aspects unique to Kṛṣṇa that are not manifest in any other *Īśvara* form: “His *līlā*, the unsurpassed love of His devotees, the sweetness of His flute, and His beauty” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Southern Quadrant 1.43).
115. See, for discussion, Sheth (1982).
116. *Mahāvākyas* are especially associated with Śaṅkara and the *advaita* tradition, for whom *tat-tvam-asi* (“you are that [*ātman*],” *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* VI.9–11) is the best known among four prominent in that tradition. Rāmānuja also has his equivalents of the *mahāvākyas*, such as “In the beginning, son, this world was simply what is existent—one only, without a second ... and it thought to itself: ‘Let me become many.’” (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* VI.2.1–3; Lipner 1986, 82). See Goswami (2012) for a discussion about *Kṛṣṇas-tu Bhagavān svayam* as a parallel *mahāvākya* of the *Bhāgavata* and its derivative traditions.
117. This is a reference to *parama-Śiva*, the ultimate expression of Truth in Śaivite theology.
118. The text reminds us constantly that “Brahmā, Śiva ... the Goddess of Fortune, Śrī, are only a fraction of a fraction of Him [Kṛṣṇa]” (X.68.37). Śiva discloses to his consort Parvatī that it is upon Viṣṇu that He meditated when He engaged in *yoga* for one thousand years (VIII.12.43–44). See also Śiva’s eulogy of Viṣṇu’s supremacy after being bewildered by the latter’s female incarnation of Mohinī (VIII.12.4–13). *Śaiva Purāṇas* claim the same for Śiva, as we will see below.
119. Since *bhūta* can refer to “ghosts” (literally “one who has gone”), Jīva mentions Bhairava here, a particular form of Śiva that is the Lord of ghosts and other afflicted beings.
120. We can also mention here, from the *Bhāgavata*, Sudakṣiṇa (X.66.27ff.) and Saubha (X.76). Likewise, the story of Hiranyakaśipu, who attained near invincibility from the worship of Brahmā, is an important narrative of the *Bhāgavata* that we will encounter in part 2.
121. There are exceptions to just about everything in the Purāṇas!
122. The text adds here: “He is ego in its three divisions of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. The transformations from this have resulted in the sixteen ingredients of the world.”
123. See I.12.23, IV.4.15, and X.76.5.
124. “Who see all beings in the *ātman*.”
125. However, it can be inferred from the Agha story in part 3 that one variant of *sāyūjya* involves an actual merging into Kṛṣṇa’s body, which would entail, to all intents and purposes, becoming one with Viṣṇu (not a spiritual clone, so to speak, as is the case with *sārūpya*). This state is called *ātmasāmya* in X.12.38.
126. See Valaveetil (1996) for a brief discussion on this.
127. Consider, for example, this passage from the *Rūdrasamhitā* of the *Śiva Purāṇa*: “Śiva thought within Himself like this: ‘Another being shall be created by Me. Let him create everything, protect it, and in the end let him dissolve it with My blessing. Having entrusted everything to him, we two [Śiva and Śakti] ... shall roam as we please, keeping only the prerogative of conferring salvation. We can stay happily ... free from worries....’ Thereupon [after Śiva churns the ocean of His mind] a person came into being who was the most charming one in the three worlds, who was calm with *Sattva* Guṇa being prominent, and who appeared to be the ocean of immeasurable majesty.... He bowed to Śiva Parameśvara and said: ‘O Lord, give me names and assign me my task.’ On hearing it, Lord Śiva laughed. With words thunderlike in resonance, Lord Śiva addressed the person thus. Śiva said: ‘You will be famous as Viṣṇu by name as you are all-pervasive. You will have many other names conferring happiness on devotees’” (6.33–43). Interestingly, Viṣṇu’s association with *sattva* and his creatorship and dominion over everything are retained in this story but reworked into a very different relationship with Śiva. See also *Śiva Purāṇa*, *Vāyaviyasamhitā* 13.11–47.

The most widely recounted story associated with Śiva's supremacy is the famous narrative where Viṣṇu (and Brahmā) is not able to find the limits of Śiva's *liṅga* (uniconic) form: *Śiva Purāṇa*, *Rudrasaṃhitā* 7–9; *Liṅga Purāṇa* I.17–19; *Skanda Purāṇa*, *Uttarārdha* 9–14. See also *Śiva Purāṇa*, *Vidyēśvarasaṃhitā* 5.28–29. Elsewhere, this text expresses an interesting arrangement whereby all three Lords get to be progenitors of the other two in different ages, albeit always as derivative entities born of the great Śiva (*Vāyaviyasaṃhitā* 13.2–26). All Purāṇas quoted here from the Motilal Banarsidass edition.

128. For an example from the Devī tradition, see the *Devī Gītā* I.14ff. and the *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 7.29.23–30.
129. See, for instance, *Gītā* II.62–62 and III.37; *Yoga Sūtras* II.12; *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* VI.14–15; *Mokṣadharma*, *Śānti Parvan* 251.7. Consider also the Second Noble Truth of Buddhism, the cause of suffering (that is, desire).
130. With some qualifications, in certain Tantra traditions it is not desire that must be renounced, since *prakṛti* is *citi-śakti*, the power of consciousness, and thus (for instance, in Kaśmir Śaivism) nondifferent from Śiva and therefore divine, not a negative entity to be renounced. So it is not the desire to enjoy *prakṛti*, but the illusion of enjoying as an entity imagined to be separate from Śiva that must be relinquished. Once that ignorance is removed, and one realizes one's own Śiva nature, then one can enjoy *śakti*. Nonetheless, the schools of right-handed Tantra do follow *yama* equivalents.
131. The *devas*, by the time of the *Gītā* and *Bhāgavata*, are depicted as beings in *samsāra* who, because of inordinately good *karma*, have attained highly *sāttvic* forms in celestial realms. However, they too reattain a human birth once this good *karma* has expired (*Gītā* VIII.10).
132. In fact, the *Gītā*'s comments pertaining to the Vedic texts parallels the discussion above of the *Bhāgavata*'s perception of other Purāṇas: "The subject of the Vedas is the three *guṇas*. Become free of the *guṇas*, Arjuna. Be situated always in *sattva*..." (II.45).
133. See also *Gītā* IX.23–24 and X.20–42.

Concluding Reflections

1. John in a vision saw God seated upon His throne (Revelation 4:1–3), and Daniel had a similar vision (Daniel 7:9–10), as did Isaiah (6:1–5). Similarly, we are told that Moses, Aaron, his sons, and the elders of Israel “saw the God of Israel” (Exodus 24:9–11). And Moses was permitted to see the back (but not the face) of God (Exodus 33:18–23). See also Ezekiel 1.40.2. See Williams (2009) for discussion and references to transcendent anthropomorphism in the Semitic traditions.
2. Colossians 1:15 and Timothy 1:17 indicate that God is invisible.
3. Certain sages recount how, despite performing intense austerities, when they arrived at Nārāyaṇa’s abode within the universe called Śvetadvīpa in the hope of seeing the Supreme Being, they were blinded by His effulgence. Other great souls who resided there, however, were able to see Nārāyaṇa.
4. Thus, etymologically, the name Jupiter is cognate with Zeus pater and, in Sanskrit, Dyaus *pitṛ*. And functionally, Thor, Zeus, and Indra are all leaders of the other celestials, associated with rain, thunder, and lightning, and have a weapon that they hurl.
5. As is well-known, aspects of the old pre-Christian traditions are absorbed into Christianity (such as the appropriation of the birthday of Mithras on December 25).
6. Various texts speak of the *devas* as having forms made of expressions of *prakṛti* other than the gross matter of this realm, such as *tanmātra* (see Bryant 2009, 74, for references; the inhabitants of Śvetadvīpa mentioned in note 3 are one such example).
7. When compared with the sword-bearing archangel Gabriel, the warrior nature of the *gandharvas* enhances the comparison.
8. Of course, *Īśvara* is simultaneously also immanent given that *prakṛti* and the *ātmans* are a part of His manifestation and therefore nondifferent from Him.
9. Actually, in Gauḍīya theology there are unlimited Vaikuṇṭha realms, as God has unlimited manifestations.
10. The exception to this is the early Vedic religion as expressed in the four Vedas, at least as construed by academic Indological methods. There is no transcendent supreme deity explicitly revealed there, but rather a situation much closer to the other Indo-European pantheons, where, at best, we find a martial chieftain prominent in the form of Indra (performing the functional parallel role of Zeus or Thor) among ontologically equal celestials. Traditional Hindu theologians have reworked this potential problem in different ways. The thirteenth-century Vaiṣṇava theologian Madhva, for example, who wrote a commentary on forty hymns of the *Ṛg-Veda*, argued that these gods originally represented the various powers of the transcendent Viṣṇu that came to be considered separate autonomous entities only in later, more spiritually decadent times. Other revisionist reworkings can be found in nineteenth-to twentieth-century monotheistic exegeses of the Vedas by prominent Hindu apologists such as Dayananda and Aurobindo.
11. *Bhāgavata* I.4.14.
12. We resist the usual translation for *avatāra* as “incarnation” (etymologically, “to enter flesh”), since Vaiṣṇava theology holds that Kṛṣṇa descends in this *Brahman* (pure consciousness) body and not one made of matter (see Lipner 1976 for a discussion in Rāmānuja’s lineage).
13. See, for example, from the most seminal thinkers, Freud as the externalization of

subconscious forces; Durkheim as social forces; Tyler as primitive science; Weber as economic forces; Marx as related to the control of the modes of production; and others.

14. For instance, Max Muller, Mircea Eliade, the Theosophists, and other shades of perennialist thinkers.
15. For a good start on the construction of the category of religion triggered by the early European encounter with the non-Western world, see Halbfass (1988), King (1999), Masuzawa (2005), Oddie (2006), Pennington (2005), and Balagangadhara (2012).
16. There are a number of instances of this throughout the text, such as the *Virāt-rūpa* material form in the second book, which is explicitly described as being meditative rather than factual.
17. The *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* in, for instance, *Yoga Sūtras* I.7.
18. The prioritizing of empiricism and reason is most noteworthy in the Cārvāka, Nyāya, and Buddhist traditions, but most schools incorporated rich intellectual argumentation into their theologies, and almost all in one way or another accepted the paramount nature of empiricism as the basis of other epistemes, other than in domains inaccessible to reason and sense perception.
19. See Halbfass (chapter 21), however, for resistance to the trump card of experience in certain conservative discourses such as the Mīmāṃsā, as in the writing of Śāṅkara.
20. The ultimate *vairāgya*, detachment, is *guṇa vaitṛṣṇyam*, disinterest in anything made of the *guṇas*.
21. The roots of the tension between mythos and logos in fact goes back to the pre-Socratics.
22. See references in previous citations.
23. Of course, aspects of the historical method are selectively appropriated by a certain genre of nationalists in such political contestations as that over Ayodhyā, the birthplace of Rāma in epic sources (Gopal 1992), and the Aryan invasion debate (Bryant 2001).
24. See Brown (2013) for an excellent discussion.
25. See Holdrege (2013) for discussion.
26. Shukavak Dāsa (1999).
27. Albeit for completely different reasons, here he appropriates part of the hierarchical schema of Śāṅkara noted earlier (himself following a Madhyāmaka Buddhist schema).
28. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, for example, the so-called father of modern India, had no place for Kṛṣṇa in his Christian Upaniṣadic mélange, institutionalized as the Brahmo Samaj, and, indeed, lambasted him with no small measure of pre-Victorian-derived indignity. Like his successors in the Brahma Samaj, such as Devendranatha Tagore and Krishna Chandra Chatterjee, he was nonetheless a monotheist (as opposed to, say, a neo-*advaitin* such as Vivekānanda), but he espoused a monotheism that conceived of God in terms much closer to the Abrahamic models that influenced them so greatly than to those of the premodern Vaiṣṇava and Śaivite traditions. We can also place the influential Dayānanda, founder of the Ārya-Samaj, on this side of the monotheistic spectrum. Others, like the more devotional Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, set out to construct and propagate a righteous Kṛṣṇa as preserved in the *Bhagavad Gītā* by extricating him from what Bankim deemed centuries of Purāṇic accretions epitomized by the Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhāgavata*. Thus purged, the sterilized Kṛṣṇa could be set up as a superior role model for humanity to the Christ of the colonizers. There was a wide spectrum of monotheistic responses to the encounter with modernity on issues lying at the core of Hindu *bhakti* (see Sardella 2010, 2013, for discussion). The monistic neo-*advaita* response is an enormous topic in its own right, which lies outside the main concerns of this study. It has, in fact, received far more attention in both scholarly and popular circles than the monotheistic strains in Hinduism, for reasons that have arguably a lot more to do with Hindu nationalism in India and New Age spirituality in the West than

any de facto reality of on-the-ground Hindu beliefs and practices past and present.

29. Note, for instance, Yaska's interpretation of Indra killing the Vṛtra demon, a pivotal Vedic and Purāṇic narrative, as the production of rain.
30. The historical accords with the traditional Vedic exegetes such as Sāyana; the mystical, which is his main focus, involves identifying hymns to various deities as actually denoting attributes of Viṣṇu; and the transcendent features the relationship between the *ātman* and *Brahman* (see Sharma 1971, 180ff., for discussion). One might wonder whether the nineteenth-century Dayānanda Sarasvatī was influenced by Madhva's approach.
31. See Edelmann (2013) for discussion.
32. For discussion and references, see Edelmann (2013). The astronomical traditions of the *Siddhāntas* and *Jyotiḥśāstra* in the period 500–1900 C.E. were willing to depart from Purāṇic cosmology without rejecting the Purāṇas themselves. Similarly, literary theory presents elaborate theoretical criteria pertaining to when a primary signification (*vācya*) of a text is to be superseded by secondary (nonliteral) readings, specifically indicated (*lakṣya*) and suggested (*vyarṅga*) meanings (briefly, wherever the primary meaning of scriptural passage is obstructed [*baddha*] by other knowledge, secondary meanings can be applied).
33. We should note, however, that Jīva would not call the mental absorption of the *asuras bhakti*, even as they might have attained some form of liberation. *Bhakti* requires a positive attitude toward *Īśvara* (see "Meditating in Enmity: Kṛṣṇa and the Demons").
34. *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 361, 743; Schiffman, 130.
35. *Autobiography of Swami Sivananda*, ix.
36. The record of this claim is buried in the organization's archives, which I was not able to access, but it is common knowledge and surfaces in the brochures and other literatures of the organization (such as the Grass Valley, California, *Guide to Programs*, 2014, 26).
37. Uttarapara speech, May 30, 1909.
38. This well-known anecdotal exchange is noted in, for example, the Inaugural Souvenir of the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute, 1975.
39. Cornell (2001).
40. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, 399.
41. Muktaṇanda (1978), chapter 20. In Kaśmir Śaivism, blue is the color of pure consciousness.
42. For excellent historical excavations of the evolution of modern postural yoga, see DeMichelis (2004), Alter (2004), Singleton (2008, 2010), Straus (2005), Syman (2010), Sjoman (1996), and Jain (2015).
43. Western forms of dualism correlate the mind and cognition with the soul (*psyche*), whereas these are outer material coverings completely distinct from the *ātman*, in Sāṅkhya, Yoga, and Vedānta (but not in Nyāya and Vaiśeṣikā, where they are qualities of the *ātman* itself).
44. There are, of course, sections of the text dealing with the mystic powers that are obviously beyond the pale of scientific acceptability.
45. In terms of theological dialogue, see the excellent work of Goswami (2012; one can only lament the author's premature demise after laying such a substantial cornerstone for a Vaiṣṇava contribution to inter-religious dialogue). In terms of the interface between the science of the *Bhāgavata* and modern science, see Thompson (1981, 2006, 2007); Cremo (1993) for an antagonistic view; and Edelmann (2014) for an accommodative view. For an excellent discussion of the challenges posed to Hinduism in general by modern science and an analysis of some of the responses this has engendered, see Mackenzie Brown (2012).
46. At the time of writing this introduction, the author received a visit from Bhadrash Swami, a *sannyasī* of the Swami Nārāyaṇa tradition, who bestowed a copy of his recently completed commentary on the *Vedānta Sūtras*. Other than evidencing the continuation of the formal *Vedānta* commentarial tradition, the swami expressed great eagerness and commitment to

improving his English, and in being exposed to the modes of the Western academic study of religion, in order to engage in dialogue with what we have been calling “modernity” in this field.

47. We follow here the Upaniṣadic usage of locating both the *ātman* and the *citta*, mind, in the heart (*Kaṭha* I.14, II.12, III.1, and IV.6–7; *Muṇḍaka* II.1.8 and 10, II.2.1, and III.1.7). Technically, according to Gauḍīya *siddhānta*, *bhāva* is bestowed by Kṛṣṇa as an act of grace (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant II.233). It is a *śakti* power that permeates the *citta* (*antarāṅga śakti*).
48. We use the term “subject-centered” heuristically. More precisely, at this stage, all notions of subject and object dissolve.
49. See, for instance, *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* III.15, V.6; *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* I.1.6; *Gītā* II.11–30; and *Yoga Sūtras* II.5.
50. The Nyāya and Vaiśeṣikā traditions hold that consciousness is only an adventitious quality of the *ātman* when in conjunction with the mind and is not manifest in liberation. Mīmāṃsā holds a similar view, although earlier Mīmāṃsā was not committed to notions of liberation.